Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

SEVEN ESSAYS

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BY

GEORGE SAMPSON

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CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1947

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By GEORGE SAMPSON

The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature

Cambridge Readings in Literature
In Five Books

Lessons in English
In Three Books

English for the English

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Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge
(Brooke Crutchley, University Printer)
and published by the Cambridge University Press
(Cambridge, and Bentley House, London)
Agents for U.S.A., Canada, and India: Macmillan

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Preface

A WRITER whose first volume was published in 1897, who has made numerous contributions to periodicals, daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annual, and who waits fifty years before issuing a collection of miscellanies, can hardly be called a young man in a hurry. And, even now, this is not a volume of reprints. I have never made any attempt to collect and publish old articles, believing that their work was done when they first appeared. Some portions of the volume have been printed before, but much of it is the substance of talks, familiar and informal, hitherto unrecorded. The audiences were usually teachers, and so the touch of an old educational hand occasionally appears. But the book is not about education, and certainly not pedagogic: it does not pretend to teach anybody anything.

Here is a rough bibliography:

1. *A Boy and His Books.* This is the substance of a series of talks, so far unprinted.

2. *On Playing the Sedulous Ape.* The substance of several talks, one quite recent. The early part of it was printed in *Essays and Studies*, Vol. VI, 1920.

3. *Truth and Beauty.* This was a talk, afterwards printed under a different title in *Essays and Studies*, Vol. XX, 1934.

4. *Bach and Shakespeare.* This was written for *The Quarterly Review* and appeared in April 1923. It was included in the late Lord Birkenhead's volume *The Hundred Best English Essays.*

5. *The Operas of Mozart.* This was written for *The Quarterly Review* and appeared in April 1936. Both 4 and 5 are reprinted with the assent of the Editor.

6. *Henry Irving.* This was begun at the request of an editor as a centenary article; but it took its own way and became quite unsuitable for a formal purpose, and was never offered for publication anywhere.

7. *The Century of Divine Songs.* This was the British Academy's Warton Lecture for 1943. It appears, with the Academy's assent, as originally printed, but portions had to be omitted in delivery, through lack of time.

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Most of the essays have been revised, mainly for chronological reasons. The Mozart essay, for instance, was topical in 1936, and referred to the Glyndebourne performances and the Salzburg festivals as current events. These now represent a civilization that has passed away for ever. Yes, for ever. Something like them may return, but in a world unstable and decivilized. The madness of Germany in 1939 has changed the world as irrevocably as the madness of France changed it in 1789.

G. S.

October 1946

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Was ich besitze, seh' ich wie im Weiten,
Und was verschwand, wird mir zu Wirklichkeiten.

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SEVEN ESSAYS

§ i

A Boy and His Books

I

I WONDER when you made your first acquaintance with poets? Was a love of poetry part of your nature, growing, unnoticed, with your growth, till at last it became manifest? Or did there come a moment when words in a certain order suddenly gave you a strange thrill, never felt before, except, perhaps, when you were swinging, and went ever so high—so high, that something inside you tickled with such a curious thrill, that you swung back and sought to go even higher to get that thrill again? Swinging back did not give it, because you were obeying the natural laws; the thrill came when you swung up in defiance of natural laws. That seems to me significant. Poetry, like all creative art, is a defiance of nature. To follow nature, however slowly or swiftly, with a range petty or immense, is to be prosaic, scientific. The astronomer exploring the dim recesses of space or time may discover a new star, but he cannot create the tiniest 'supplemental asteroid'. The poet putting words together, the musician putting sounds together, the painter putting forms and colours together, do something beyond the powers of nature. Nature, working with forces imperceptible, can hew out the Matterhorn or carve the Grand Canyon of the Colorado; but all the powers of nature combined cannot build the cathedral of Chartres or compose the *Matthew Passion* or write the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Poetry is beyond nature; it is supernatural; and the poet himself does not know his secret and cannot impart it. He can make

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a poem, but he cannot make another poet. Matthew Prior declares, in homely words, the miracle of poetry:

> Verse comes from Heaven, like inward light:
> Mere human pains can ne'er come by't:
> The god, not we, the poem makes,
> We only tell folks what he speaks.

Reams of criticism and philosophy cannot take us much beyond that.

II

Prior, who perhaps remembered the minstrel in the *Odyssey*, asserts the inspirational origin of poetry. We do not now believe, like the ancient prophets, in divine inspiration, nor do we invoke the Muses; but we all know that poetry comes how and when it will and cannot be commanded or constrained. The poet speaks, and the words are not his own, but seem to come from somewhere afar. But the words are his own in this respect, that he can alter and rearrange them. Poetry, in its origin, is unconscious, inexplicable art, a kind of magic; but poetry, as transmitted, is conscious, deliberate art. The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, may have a vision of the poem; the poet's ear, disabled from frenzied rolling, calmly adjusts the vowels and the consonants, not without light from the finely frenzied eye. It is a pity that we have none of Shakespeare's original manuscripts, and are thus debarred from knowing whether his most magical passages were revised by the conscious artist; but we have in Beethoven's sketch-books extraordinarily valuable evidence of a creative mind at work. Some people find this conscious craftsmanship disconcerting. Thus Lamb was put out by seeing the Milton manuscripts at Cambridge; yet Lamb was himself an author, and must have had second and better thoughts. Tennyson, who revised his early poems drastically, was angry when people dug up the discarded versions. But to some of us there is pleasure of no base kind in watching the conscious artist giving the best form

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to his unconscious creations. True, the conscious artist may injure his unconscious creations. Yeats altered some of his early poems to make them accord with his later theories and, in the opinion of not a few, ruined them. This is true of prose as well. Eminent novelists have been tempted to revise their books for a new, collected edition and have irreparably damaged them. It is very dangerous for a writer to revise his work when the days of inspiration have passed away. The head may be fatally active when the heart is feeble. The failure of inspiration is one of the many phenomena of the creative act which we do not understand. We must think, therefore, of the poet both as creator and as craftsman. The poem may be magically precipitated in words; but the words, being there, are subject to the scrutiny of the conscious artist. He has come out of his dream.

III

The mystery of poetic creation has of course been made clear by quasi-scientific explanations, which, coming after the event, are always right. We should be more convinced if the prophecies came before the event. No one has ever discovered what makes one man essentially a poet and another not, or why these words in this order produce a magical effect denied to those words in that order. Even creative reception remains a mystery—reception which is not creative being imperfect reception. Appeals to our now aged friend, the 'unconscious', are vain, for it lies beyond our knowing. We all possess what is called the 'unconscious', but we are not all poets, we are not all even dreamers. Some find, or used to find, the secret in 'self-expression'—an odd compound, as no one can express anything which is not self. The artist, we are assured, is moved by experience to expression, and so transmits his experience as art. Critics of music seem to like this explanation, and as music may help us a little we will take an example. Henry Prunières is very emphatic about experience and expression, and declares

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that a musician will not 'express these sentiments with authority, unless he has experienced them at some given moment of his existence'. Well, we can test this at once by a brief example. One of Schubert's best-known songs is *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, a setting of 'Meine Ruh' ist hin' from Goethe's *Faust*. We hear it, and we exclaim, 'How wonderful! What Shakespearian insight into the depths of a woman's soul!' And then we remember that the composer, whose 'experience at some given moment of his existence' enabled him to 'express these sentiments with authority', was a small, chubby-faced, spectacled youth of seventeen. The truth is that 'experience' is one of those ensnaring words that easily betray us. There is a vital difference between the creative, imaginative experience of the artist and the personal, physical experience of the man. What experience had Blake when he wrote the earliest of his *Poetical Sketches*?

Music is unique among the arts because it has no relation whatever to the world of fact and experience. (We can disregard the occasional examples of imitative or descriptive music, because they have, for a time, come out of their world, and, in any case, must succeed as music.) You may play through the whole of the forty-eight preludes and fugues of Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier* and never find the least approach to the world of fact and experience. This is true also of the vast mass of instrumental music by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms, the few exceptions being rare and, when examined, not really exceptional. But you are conscious of a world to which all are strictly obedient. What is that world? Poetry, however remote from life, pictorial and plastic art, however defiant of ocular fact, must have some relation to normal experience, or they could not exist. You cannot have a musical picture or a musical statue. The paintings of Paul Klee and the figures of Henry Moore are not musical in any sense whatever. Music lives in its own world, and has its own life and experience totally separated from the world to which poetry and painting

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must be related. That is why mysteriously gifted infants like Mozart and our own William Crotch can play and compose music before they have had time to observe the world or have any vital experiences. They draw upon a hidden life of which we—and they—know nothing at all. So Schubert wrote his song, not out of personal experience of women, but out of the artistic experience that came by divination, by inspiration, by some impulse arising from the inner depths of his being, unknown to consciousness, unfathomable by reason. The nature of that impulse is not only unknown, but unknowable. 'Mere human pains can ne'er come by't.' It is magic.

The magic must be transmitted—we must be made to feel the spell. What are the signs of its presence? A. E. Housman, in his lecture-essay *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, told us that the immediate effect of poetical magic upon him was physical —he had what is called 'gooseflesh', and he located the sensation at the pit of the stomach, exactly where one felt that curious tickle when swinging. The test is not infallible and not universal; but it is a test, and endures as a test however often used. To this day there are long-familiar passages of poetry which I cannot read aloud to an audience without a strong effort of physical self-control. Well, when did you first feel that curious thrill, and what poem caused it? I wish more people would tell us that secret.

IV

These reflections on the nature of artistic experience may help us to understand how and why poetry appeals to children. (Children: that is to say some children or many children. I do not make predications about all children, nor do I acknowledge the existence of that figment of educational text-books, 'the child'. Children, after all, are individuals. Whenever the word 'children' is hereinafter used it must be understood as thus qualified.) Children may not come trailing clouds of glory from heaven—indeed, they sometimes appear to trail mephitic

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vapours from the pit; but Wordsworth's great Ode is vitally true in its presentation of the important psychological and physiological truth that a child is not a little adult. All the numerous and shocking mistakes that have been made—that are still being made—in the upbringing and instruction of children arise from the common conviction that a child is a miniature adult, that is, a reasonable being, capable of conviction by intellectual means. Children are creative (and destructive) by natural impulse, not through any form of reasoning. So it is by a kind of creative instinct that they like poetry. They are still living in that mysterious world to which music belongs. In their world the writs of reason do not run. Children, like the lunatic, the lover and the poet, are of imagination all compact. One sees more devils than vast hell can hold; that is, in plain prose, children populate their world with demons, fairies, witches and monsters, with talking animals and vocal trees. The lover, all as frantic, sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt. Behold, then, the small girl turning with polite indifference from the finest Lenci doll to cherish her beloved Golliwog or Teddy, which lives and moves and has its being at her word, which comforts her in sorrow, and soothes her at last to sleep. Such tricks hath strong imagination. At length the man perceives it die away and fade into the light of common day.

From the man I return to the child—to the child I know best. Looking back over the past is dangerously deceptive, because one tends to see gloriously, to substitute what one would like to have seen for what one actually saw. But I find, now that I am really old, and survive defiant of time, that I see the distant past more clearly than the recent. I have various means of recovering the last half-century; but I have no means of recovering that small child, except memory, and I find it serves me well enough. Places, persons and things survive with a persistence that guarantees their truth to fact. One can invent very little about early childhood.

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V

Do you really like autobiography, that is, self-story? Or do you read autobiographies to discover what writers have to say about other people? You will find this dull, because it is merely the story of a childhood and a boyhood—the story, in short, of growth; and so it has no bright revelations. Indeed, books, and very commonplace books, are almost more important than the boy; and the question that insists on asking itself and cannot by me be answered is whether the boy discovered the books or whether the books discovered the boy. Suppose there had been no books?

You must picture me as the youngest of a small middle-class family, having neither poverty nor riches. There was nothing whatever resembling luxury, but I cannot remember being denied anything I needed. My whole childhood was irradiated by the happy chance that placed my birth in Greenwich, with its great park, its busy river, its noble buildings, and its tradition of the old Navy in the days of wooden sailing-ships. 'Ironclads', as they were called, were dangerous novelties, not to be trusted. Indeed, they were quite modern; for the first fight between ironclads had happened no longer ago than 1862, when *Monitor* and *Merrimac* pounded each other during the American Civil War. At the time of my birth people were still talking about the Franco-German War, lately over. The Mutiny lay sixteen years behind and the Crimean War eighteen or nineteen—a period far shorter than that which separates the young of to-day from the Armistice of 1918. It will be seen that I am thoroughly Victorian. The men whom I knew had all played some part in the events of the mid-century. Though I was born in Greenwich, I narrowly escaped being born in Jersey, from which my parents came and in which my three older sisters were born. And, even so, my father was not a true Jerseyman, for his father came from an old Cornish stock, and had left Cornwall to settle in Jersey.

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I don't know why and never thought of asking; for as my father was born at St Helier in 1830 it is chronologically clear that I did not know his father, who must have been born before the battle of Trafalgar. All my grandparents were dead before I was born and my other relatives were so few and so remote that I have no recollection of any of them, except two second cousins. Indeed, I seemed to have no relatives, a state of things that would have pleased Samuel Butler. Whether one is better or worse for not belonging to a clan I cannot say, as I have no means of judging. I suppose, with my Cornish-Jersey ancestry, I am not quite the true-born Englishman, though nothing could have been more completely English than the Greenwich of the early seventies in which I grew up.

I wish our recollections of childhood were not so patchy. There is no clear sequence. Some trivial circumstance is quite vivid, and then a black curtain falls, and rises to reveal a later, disjunct event. My very earliest recollection is of a large room with two windows, one of which had an independent pane which could be opened and kept at various angles by an iron rod. That movable pane fascinated me, and through that window I took my first remembered observation of the world. What I saw outside was a graveyard, long disused, the burial place of ancient mariners. When I was old enough to toddle out there alone I used to meet a large tortoise who seemed to spend his life in circumnavigating an old grey ivy-covered erection with closed and rusty iron gate from which mysterious moss-covered steps descended into the unknown. This was called The Vault. The monument I most clearly recall was a stout stone pillar terminating in a stone flag perpetually at half-mast, commemorating those who had perished in the wreck of the *Birkenhead*, twenty-one years before I was born. When I grew a little older, there were those who could tell me at first hand the story of that noble disaster. I liked this monument before I knew what it was or what significance lay in that forlornly drooping flag. A morbid, unwholesome environment for a child just old

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enough to notice things consciously—so a psychologist might exclaim, and I, in my turn, should exclaim, Rubbish! I was far too young to have any notion of death and the grave. The grey Vault did not interest me, the tortoise did. Moreover, the *Birkenhead* monument stood close to the high railings that shut off the graveyard from the main road—it was meant to be seen from the road. There, by the monument, safely railed in from danger, I watched the stream of life flow past—horse-drawn trams, dashing carriages, butchers' carts with boys pinnacled high on the front, and strange machines with one big wheel followed by a little wheel miraculously supporting men who propelled them with their feet. These, I was told, were called velocipedes; but I think that name was obsolete in England—my parents had only recently arrived from a half-foreign island. Sometimes people paused and spoke to the small child whose habitation was among the tombs, and I replied readily (if not intelligibly), for during childhood I was never shy and talked with ease. It was an entirely happy little boy who wandered alone among the relics of the dead and was sometimes taken into the great park which lay just behind us. I have a photograph belonging to this period. It shows a small child in petticoats sitting cross-legged at ease, like an elderly clubman, and regarding someone with a look of perceptible contempt—probably the innocent photographer who, no doubt, had told me to watch for the dicky-bird that would emerge when he uncapped the camera. That child is plainly saying with hauteur, 'I am not to be imposed upon'.

VI

Suddenly the scene changes. How, when or why it changed I do not know, and cannot remember the act of change. In distance the change was slight, but I was presented with an entirely new set of circumstances. I had lost my little window and received instead one broad expanse of glass through which

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I saw no tombs, but a pleasant garden planted with shrubs and bushes, some of which bore real gooseberries and currants. It was much smaller than the old graveyard, but to me it seemed vast. Again I was shut off from the road by high railings. When I went out into the garden I stood before Wren's great College buildings just across the way. To the right, close by, lay a great new fact, the River; to the left, further off, was a different entrance to the park; and there in full view was the Observatory, with the mysterious ball that went up and came down at one o'clock and told the world its time. I was never tired of watching the rise and descent of the ball. I associate that garden specially with the scent of lilac coming from bushes near the door. To this day the faintest smell of lilac takes me back to childhood, and the old garden, and the plain brick building with its surrounding colonnade under which the door was set. My senses were and are very acute. Smells, flavours, sights and sounds made strong impressions, and I had, in the matter of food, pronounced likes and dislikes which have remained almost unchanged.

As soon as we took up our new quarters I became severely ill and nearly died. I mention this fact because it had an important effect on my development. I learned afterwards, from my mother's talk to visitors, that my recovery was regarded as a kind of miracle—the tale lost nothing in the telling. Of that illness I have not the slightest recollection, I know of it only from my mother's oft-told tale. Here, indeed, a psychologist would rightly put his finger on a bad spot in my growth. I had been almost fatally ill, with no knowledge of the fact; but I was never allowed to forget it. I was always the little boy who nearly died, and recovered miraculously. I was very delicate, was always described as delicate, and so grew up with that kind of taint upon me. Suddenly the curtain lifts for a moment, and I am clearly aware of a child in a large bed with one of those old-fashioned patch-work quilts beloved of the young. I see my mother with a

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strange, bearded, spectacled man called the doctor, and on the bed is a Noah's Ark with its animals scattered about, and a book, my very first book, a large and highly coloured Alphabet Book, beginning 'A was an Archer who shot at a Frog'. Obviously I am getting well, or there would be no such book. I see also a dish containing eggs, each with something scribbled on it. I ask the doctor what the scribble means, and he tells me that it is the date when the eggs were laid, so that we can be sure they are fresh. I am astonished, and ask how chickens can know the date. I am told I must not ask questions, but lie still and get well. I assure him that it does not hurt me to ask questions; but the mystery of the date is not explained. Then the curtain falls; and when it rises I am a little boy of five in knickerbockers. Illness and alphabet book are totally forgotten, for I am alive and well and running about, and, greatest mystery of all, I can read.

I call my ability to read a mystery, because I have not the least recollection of how I acquired it. I learned later that my teacher was my eldest sister, so much older than I that she seemed almost a young woman. She attended the Roan School, and appeared to know everything. I am fearful of saying that she was a girl of unusually fine intellectual and artistic gifts because she and I were extraordinarily alike in appearance, save that she had lovely dark curling hair and mine was obstinately straight. We two alone had the vertical indentation in the forehead just above the nose, a family mark which we inherited from our father. With her I read my first real book, which was *The Pilgrim's Progress* with lavishly coloured pictures, and my second, which was Hans Andersen, and my third, which was Grimm, with a second part containing Hauff's *The Caravan*. This included a most fascinatingly gruesome story about a ship, with its terrible captain nailed to the mast by a huge spike driven through his forehead. Modern educationalists would shudder at the spectacle of a small child devouring this fearful story; but their shudders would be

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wasted, for I got no harm from it and never even dreamed of it. I think I must have grasped quite early the important fact that a book lives a life of its own, apart from the life of every day. When I read about fairies or witches or giants I accepted the facts as true for the books and asked no questions. Of course it was my father (altogether the best and finest man I have ever known) who commissioned my sister to get what books she thought suitable. She gave me, from her own store, a discarded school book called *Dr Pinnock's History of England*, with the oddest of cuts by way of illustration. An ugly little book, bound in black leather, but it fascinated me. Either Dr Pinnock must have been preternaturally clear or I was singularly acute in understanding, for I was then much more at home with the multitudinous Edwins and Edgars of pre-Norman history than I have ever been since. But perhaps that was because they came first.

VII

You are not to suppose that all this happened while I was still five; but it happened quite early; and the fact that I could read intelligently at five is attested by a date. We took a wonderful weekly paper called *The Illustrated London News*, which I read industriously, and which kept me informed pictorially about current events, one of which was serious, the threat of a war with Russia. This meant much to Greenwich, where there were many pensioners on the reserve liable to be called up for service. Everybody was whistling or singing a song containing these memorable words:

> We don't want to fight, but by Jingo if we do,
> We've got the ships, we've got the men, we've got the money too.

But the Russians (then properly called Rooshans) did not get Constantinople, and the threat of war passed away. So I belong to the Jingo period, and I think I am rather a Jingo still. I am sure it is better to be an honest Jingo than to be a Nazi or a

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Fascist or an imitation of both called a Communist. I should loathe to be addressed as 'Comrade'.

When I was seven I suffered my first personal loss, for my eldest sister left us to go to a once famous school at Cammin, near Stettin. It was sad to lose my dear teacher. She was named Mary, loveliest of girls' names. We all had plain, simple names —Eileen and Doris and Jeremy had not then come in. I cannot help noting the singular fact that my second sister's first Christian name was Sarah, though she was never called by it. Evidently someone in the family was doomed to literature, for I appear ridiculously in Dickens and my sister tragically in Lessing. With Mary gone, I was thrown more upon myself. As I grew I was as free and happy as a child could be. I was carefully taught to recite my name and full address, so that if I got lost a policeman could help me. I never got lost. Then I was allowed to cross the road, as long as no horse and cart was in sight, and explore the College, with its great Painted Hall, full of pictures of naval engagements, and containing in a small room at the end the relics of Nelson, including the very coat he was wearing when he was shot at Trafalgar. Facing the Painted Hall under the opposite colonnade was the Chapel with West's great picture of St Paul and the viper. There was also a Museum which, as a child, I thought dull. I could also wander, outside the College railings, along the little riverside esplanade which led from the 'Ship' to the 'Trafalgar', where the Ministers (whoever they were) came for Whitebait Dinners. (You remember that it was in a room in one of these hotels— no doubt the 'Ship'—that Bella took the Cherub for her first runaway dinner and also for her second runaway dinner, after she had become Mrs John Rokesmith.) Though I did not know who the Ministers were—one of them I understood was a suspicious character named Gladstone—my political education began quite early, for there was a time when Greenwich was plastered with bills adjuring us to vote for the Baron de Worms. How singular! What was 'vote', and was there a real person

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called the Baron de Worms? He should have lived in a twisty castle in some story-book country. Then, when I was eight, every one was talking about the death of Beaconsfield, called also Disraeli or Dizzy. It appeared to be a calamitous event. But I return to my rambles. On a small grass eminence near the 'Trafalgar' end of the esplanade stood an obelisk dedicated to the memory of the 'Intrepid Bellot', who had perished in one of the Franklin relief expeditions. It appeared my fate to be nurtured on monuments. This one gave me the lovely new word 'intrepid'. Out in the river was an old anchored ship called H.M.S. *Fisgard*. What purpose it served I never knew; but it was a busy ship with boats putting off and returning and bells sounding at intervals. Eight bells was my bed-time. I had a second ship, not so instantly in view, that strange ship built on dry land in the grounds of the Royal Hospital School.

More adventurous were my wanderings in the Park, for that meant crossing the main road with its busy traffic. Usually there was a policeman to take me over, and then there was nothing but a short walk to the Park itself. Park, do I call it? It was Paradise, with its limitless range of walks, its old trees and its grassy hills, down which one could excitedly roll. And what a view was displayed from the terrace in front of the Observatory!—the School with the Queen's House and its long colonnades, the ship, the vast College with its two domes, and the great silver sickle of river curving away towards the dim distance of London. Could any child have had a finer home?

VIII

I was, as I have said, free to come and go as I pleased; but one important experience was denied me: I could not go to school. The doctor forbade this emphatically. 'He is much too delicate; his brain is too active already.' How often did I hear these words repeated to visitors, who never failed to comment on my delicate appearance and pale face. (Actually, I think some

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of my pallor was due to a good, healthy thick skin, for which I have always been grateful.) I was evidently expected to fade away at any moment, though I never felt ill, was never sick, and never, in childhood or manhood, suffered from headaches, though I have had many excuses for having them. Whether my first serious illness was a sort of capital investment I am not able to say, but I cannot remember suffering from any of the usual ailments of childhood, not even measles. Possibly I had them and forgot them. So I was brought up to be delicate and forbidden to play rough games. Delicate, delicate, delicate! the word was ever with me. Illness or worse was always waiting for me just round the corner. No; certainly not a good childhood in that respect. But though others may have been apprehensive, I was not. I think the doctor was right, for the child I remember was eager, fervid, intense, always positive and emphatic. I certainly did not need the stimulus of school. My physical courage was and is of a low order, but I had no mental fears. From the age of seven I slept in a little room by myself, and had no fears of the dark and no night terrors, many dreams, but no nightmares. I was very quick in noticing things, especially the personal oddities of people and their manner of speech, which I always attempted to imitate as a kind of joke. When we paid or received visits I met adults on equal terms and chattered quite freely, and what I said appeared to others, though not to me, extremely amusing. Children I regarded as curiosities, babies I regarded not at all. The epithet invariably applied to me was 'old-fashioned'. What this meant I could never understand; but when in later years I was able to review my childhood I could see that I was literally old-fashioned—I was accustomed to the company of older people and talked in a grown-up way. I cannot remember any one who talked down to me in 'baby-language'.

That my speech was over-large for my years and size was not surprising, for I was a mighty reader. I could now go on without aid. Park and College and river were playgrounds for the

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warm weather. In the colder seasons my unfailing recreation was reading. There was a large, comfortable cushioned seat or divan fitted under the broad window, and there I could sit or kneel and look into the garden and beyond, where two large cowls swung slowly and menacingly in the wind. I thought of them as giants. But usually I was curled up on this couch with a book. Mary was away in Germany, and my next two sisters were less addicted to reading, though they were good companions, especially when they were free in the evenings, and we sat round the table with its old-fashioned check cover and played with cards and dominoes. The spots on the dominoes led me to another diversion. We had a large number of what seemed to be pennies and half-pennies; but alas, they bore the image and superscription of Napoleon III and were not current here, as, apparently, they had been in Jersey. Perhaps my tepid interest in currency questions is due to my early dissatisfaction with coins that could buy nothing. But at least I could play with them and arrange them in squares. Two each side made four, three rows of three made nine, four rows of four made sixteen—these were the squares of two and three and four. Five—a four with one in the middle—made a pleasing pattern, especially when repeated: I had discovered the quincunx, of which I was afterwards to read in Sir Thomas Browne. But there were horrid numbers which would make no satisfactory patterns. So, without knowing it, the infant Pythagoras was learning the mysteries of numbers. I never had an abacus, and I think the coins were better. But playing at numbers was mere pastime. The real thing to do was to read. In a proper middle-class home there would have been a book-case with glass doors securely locked to preserve from rude contact the bound volumes of *Sunday at Home* it contained. I often encountered these locked book-prisons and wondered why they were always shut and who kept the key. In our oddly assorted, independent household, where no one seemed like any one else, we certainly had a book-case or set of book-shelves, but it had

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no doors and was never meant to have doors; moreover, it contained no volumes of *Sunday at Home*. I began to explore this for myself. What a collection! How did it come into existence? Nobody seemed to buy books in any regular way, yet books were there in plenty. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Little Women*, *The Wide Wide World*, *Queechy*, *Daisy*, *Ben Hur*, *Barriers Burned Away* were there and were duly read by me. But why this riot of Americana? I suppose my sisters acquired these transatlantic classics, which, somehow, were in high favour with girls. Many volumes must have survived from an older generation. Thus I found a copy of Dr Watts on the Improvement of the Mind. Now whose mind was to be improved when that book appeared in the collection? I never saw any one even look at it, and I certainly did not attempt to read it myself, not because it was hard, but simply because it was ugly. I liked books to be pretty. So I was attracted by three, perhaps four, small volumes called *The Adventures of Gil Blas of Santillana* because they were bound in soft leather, very pleasant to touch. They surprised me greatly when I tried to read them, for the letter s appeared to be printed as f, and it amused me to say 'preffed' instead of 'pressed'. But I soon noticed that the long s was not f, as the crossing went only half-way, and the ordinary s was used at the ends of words. Behold me, then, at the age of seven, immersed in *Gil Blas* and making light of its curious printing. There were other attractive volumes also printed with that funny s, one containing *Zadig* and *Candid* bound together. I liked *Zadig*, but could make nothing of *Candid*, and soon gave it up. *Tales of the Genii* suited me much better. These little books were numbers of *Cooke's Pocket Edition of Select Novels*, and were 'embellished with engravings'. One of them has survived in my possession to this day. Oddest of the books I discovered was one bearing the astonishing title, *O'Gorman's Intuitive Calculations*. Perhaps I have not got the name right, for I have never seen the book since nor met any one who had ever heard of it. So strange a title aroused curiosity. It was

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about numbers, and I was interested in the behaviour of numbers. But what did 'Intuitive Calculations' mean? I was told it meant getting sums right without knowing how. That I ever did more than glance through the pages is most improbable; but I must have been mysteriously infected by the book, for when, in the grown-up years, I became an inspector of schools, and was discussing with some colleagues the perennial topic of how to teach children the first rules in arithmetic, I was suddenly asked how I added and subtracted for myself. When I showed how, my colleagues unanimously agreed that though I got the right answers, I attained them by methods (or no methods) which could not be tolerated in any school. Can this have been the result of intuitive infection by Gorman or O'Gorman?

IX

One book which was a long enduring delight was *Don Quixote*, a nice large volume with numerous illustrations which I afterwards found to be the work of Sir John Gilbert. But, you will say, even a very precocious reader of seven could not possibly understand *Don Quixote*, which is a book for the fully matured mind. The objection is unsound. Children understand by a kind of divination which has no relation to reasoning. For them, words have no intellectual meaning, they have significance. Words are not the vehicle of ideas, they present symbols, which are interpreted somewhere beyond reason. As my two swinging cowls were threatening giants, not pieces of machinery with an explicable use, Don Quixote's conviction that the windmills were giants seemed to me entirely natural. The understanding of a work of art—if it can be rightly called understanding—is not the same as the understanding of a problem in mathematics or of a theory in philosophy. Children do not love fairy tales by reason. They do not even concern themselves with truth or probability. They divine an artistic congruity in the story and ask no more. I never questioned the existence of

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Apollyon or the Giant Despair, who were, to me, forms more real than living man, but not obviously part of common life. It is doubtful whether we properly appreciate the immense selective power of youth, its ability to choose just what it wants and to reject what it does not need. The attempt to make children understand what they do not wish to understand—to give them, in short, an adult's point of view is a grave mistake. Children can understand everything, except the explanations, because the explanations put them out—explanations take them into an alien world. I suppose that when I first read *Don Quixote* I read the parts that interested me, passed blankly and swiftly over the parts that did not interest me, and took up the tale at a point where interest began again. In this process of selection the important fact is that I chose for myself. I do not presume to make laws for other people; I can only say that the experience of totally unrestricted reading in my boyhood has given me a strong prejudice against disembowelled 'children's editions' of great books. I read the whole of Pope's Homer when I was still hardly out of childhood, and never faltered. Let the boy or girl loose upon the whole book, to conquer or be conquered. That is the way to make readers. I am infuriated by the anxiety of adults to mess about with children's reading. That is a kind of Nazi bullying. Why can't they let children alone? The genuineness of my interest in *Don Quixote* is attested by the fact that I not only read my favourite scenes over and over again, but steadily enlarged their range. The only detail in *Don Quixote* which I could not understand was that people thought the hero mad because he sallied forth in the armour of a knight. Surely everyone who, in the noble past, went out to right the wrongs of the world wore armour and carried shield and lance. Were there not pictures in the invaluable Pinnock to prove this? And had I not learned from some story or picture about the knight's long vigil before his armour on the eve of his knighthood? It was sad that poor Don Quixote got hurt when he charged the windmills and the

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hordes of Alifanfaron; but if he thought they were really giants and heathen armies, was he not to be admired for his dauntless courage? Certainly I believed him to be a most noble knight and never thought him ridiculous. Was my intuitive calculation very far from the truth? For me Don Quixote was what Browning beautifully calls him, 'the friendless people's friend'. I am glad I have crossed the plain of La Mancha, with its immense distance and its little pillared windmills, so utterly unlike our southern English variety that no deep degree of delusion is needed to suppose them giants.

I did not read the Bible, for Bibles were such dull-looking books, with small print crowded into double columns; but the Bible was read to me every Sunday evening by my mother, from a huge volume with gilt clasps and edges and highly coloured illustrations. She favoured the Old Testament, and from an early age I became familiar with the great figures of Biblical story. It was at a later stage of boyhood that I saw a picture of Tobias and the Angel, and demanding to know what the story was, I learned that it was in a part of the Bible called the Apocrypha, usually left out. I insisted on having a copy of these omitted books, and in due course received a small volume which I read for myself. Surely these books should be more often printed with the Bible. Young Daniel was the first Sherlock Holmes; for *Susanna* and *Bel and the Dragon* are detective stories, the latter employing the means of detecting footprints used in *The Golden Pince-Nez*.

The books I have mentioned are nearly all adult literature, but I simply took them as they came. I did not disdain juvenile literature, I made no distinction whatever between 'adult' and 'juvenile' and was hardly aware that there was any distinction to be made. Everything was just reading. Among the less weighty fare which the old bookcase yielded should be named *The Playfellow*, *Evenings at Home*, *Parables from Nature*, *Holiday House*, the two Alice books (which I read as gravely as I read *Don Quixote*) and a long row of Mrs Ewing's delightful slender

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volumes—all typical early 'juveniles', unknown (save *Alice*) to most modern children. My regular periodical at that time was appropriately *Chatterbox*, for I chattered to every one or no one. There was a pleasure in talking, even if there were no one to listen. Indeed, it was more than a pleasure, it was a natural need. I liked reading about natural history, but never had the slightest inclination to keep animal pets. Guinea-pigs, white mice and so forth aroused in me a kind of disgust—I could not bear to touch them. And even when I was older I never wanted to collect butterflies and moths—not even postage stamps; but books—ah, that was a different matter! To be able to call certain books my own was an enduring joy. In mechanical things I took no interest at all. Boys are supposed to have a passion for engines and an ambition to be engine-drivers, though they are probably all air-minded to-day. That passion passed me by. Unlike Budge and Toddie I never wanted 'to see wheels go wound'. That wheels should go round was their natural behaviour, it was what they were made for, and therefore not interesting; but to see a lovely lady at Sanger's Circus poised on a galloping horse and jumping through paper-covered hoops and alighting on the horse's back again, that was indeed something to marvel at—something 'against nature'. It was art. I was occasionally taken down the river to a forgotten pleasure-resort called Rosherville Gardens. What we did there I don't know. I enjoyed these trips greatly; but I stayed on deck to watch the river and the shipping, which always fascinated me; I never wanted to see the engines or to inquire what made the paddle-wheels go round. It will be seen that my deficiences were many. The river was our natural highway. When father took us to the London buildings, museums and galleries we always went by steamer from Greenwich pier, which was quite near us. I knew the river well before it was disfigured by the Tower Bridge. In later years, as long as the boats lasted, I always used that mode of travel, and grew familiar with London below bridges, a region

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that most Londoners know nothing about. The journey had the beauty of leisure, also a joy unknown to the horde of scurrying moderns, who have no time to stand and stare.

X

I have said something about my early reading, and you will now think it time that I made my first acquaintance with poets, about whom I have been so far mute. Still, I could not tell you anything about a child's first approach to poetry without trying to show you what sort of child it was. You will picture a small boy, pale and dark-haired, delicate in body, yet hardy in mind, carefully shielded, yet free to roam through great buildings and parkland and by the ever-busy river, very happy, never hearing a harsh word or meeting an unkind look, quite a young visitor, too, for I had several friends, mostly old sailors —and surely old sailors are the best of men—upon whom I gravely called and listened to their yarns and saw the things they had made during their long voyages in sailing-ships or collected at distant ports. The terrible name of Cape Horn and the dreaded southern ocean were early known to me. So, bookishly inclined as I certainly was, I was neither sedentary nor secluded, but a little man of the world, confident of welcome and never shy. I suppose my very earliest book of poems was *Hymns, Ancient and Modern*, some of which I liked very much, especially the two Lenten hymns, 'Forty days and forty nights' and 'Christian, dost thou see them', because they were definite and concrete, and not cloudy, as some hymns are to children. But as I never thought of hymns apart from their tunes, they can hardly count as poems. Mere chance discovery led me to my first real acquaintance with poets. Searching in the bookcase for something new to read, I picked out a volume bearing the single name, Coleridge. It contained nothing but poems and looked discouraging. But the title of one long piece caught my eye, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Ancient

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mariners, dead and alive, had been familiar to me from my earliest years, and here was an ancient mariner's yarn told in a long string of short stanzas. I tried it and was soon entranced. Consider the beginning, how it arrests at once the reader's attention and compels him to listen. No wonder the Wedding Guest was helpless! I had thrills that no reading had ever given me before. I not only had the curious tickle of swinging, I had my first shudder when the spectre bark hove in sight, and I was reminded of that other terrible ship in *The Caravan*, which, however, had not made me shudder—an unconscious recognition of the difference between a poem and an extravagant story. The poem filled my mind, and for days I could talk of nothing else. Of course, to make the tale beautifully complete I ought to say that I went straight on to *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan* and became a firm disciple of Coleridge at the age of seven. But I did nothing of the kind. Whether specially gifted children are properly symmetrical in their reading I do not know. I was lamentably indiscriminate. Having pored over *The Ancient Mariner* and glutted myself with it, I put the book away and proceeded to get my next thrill from something much inferior.

I suppose the Coleridge volume was one of my eldest sister's prize books, and I suppose that my next and most valuable discovery had been part of someone's school equipment. That discovery was nothing more lofty than three books of miscellaneous selections, evidently meant for instruction. They were compiled, I should guess, about the mid-century. There were well-chosen passages about history, voyages and travels, foreign adventure, natural history and so on, together with famous scenes from fiction, rhetorical prose pieces for declamation and, above all, an abundance of poetry. There were also word-exercises of a kind that children now rarely get, or meet only in the new disguise of 'intelligence tests'. For me these unpretentious volumes were a fount of knowledge and a source of pleasure. My range of reading was immensely widened. I heard

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for the first time of Sir Walter Scott as poet and as novelist and I devoured eagerly Macaulay's enthralling narrative of the siege of Londonderry. In one of the volumes I found a short poem by Mrs Hemans called *The Graves of a Household*; and once more came the magic thrill as I read these vivid stanzas:

> The sea, the blue, lone sea hath one—
> He lies where pearls lie deep:
> He was the loved of all, yet none
> O'er his low bed may weep.
>
> One sleeps where southern vines are dressed
> Above the noble slain:
> He wrapped the colours round his breast
> On a blood-red field of Spain.

The sound and colour of the lines! Who could resist them? Judged by the Housman test they should be genuine poetry, for the physical symptoms were duly exhibited. But no one would now admit them to be poetry or give them a place in a book for children. Yet I am sure there are still children who would respond to them. The third poem to carry me off my feet was Byron's *Sennacherib*. The sheer onslaught of the lines was irresistible. I already knew the story from the Sunday Bible readings. So I, who had finished with the book of Coleridge when I had won for myself *The Ancient Mariner*, now found myself steadily working through these old books, enjoying the varied prose, toying with the exercises, and considering the merits of each piece of verse, disliking this decisively, liking that tepidly, and rejoicing in another intensely. Increase of appetite grew by what it fed on. These mere waifs and strays of books, which might easily have been thrown away as lumber, proved an inexhaustible treasure for me. Who could have foreseen that? I am rising towards nine, and, thanks to these precious volumes, accumulating knowledge and becoming critical.

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XI

I propose to interrupt my narrative by a few reflections. I have already discussed understanding. I will add this: when the elements of life are presented simply and concretely, a child can understand, even though many incidents lie beyond his experience. He need not have seen a devil in order to become almost a participant in the fight between Christian and Apollyon and to tremble at the dreadful threat, 'I am void of fear in this matter, prepare thyself to die, for I swear by my Infernal Den that thou shalt go no further, here will I spill thy soul'. So, by the same kind of divination, he can understand much of *Don Quixote*; but he cannot begin to understand any of *The Egoist*. A child can understand *The Ancient Mariner*; he cannot understand *A Toccata of Galuppi's*. You may expect a child to leave gaps; you must not expect him to fill gaps. Browning depends upon the active co-operation of the reader in making explicit what is implicit. That is a feat beyond the power of childhood; moreover, if fully recorded, the facts in the *Toccata* and in many other poems of Browning are not of a kind to have interest for children. (But of course *The Pied Piper* was delightful.) Some of the delusively simple poems of Wordsworth mean nothing to children, because they present the intuitions of an adult mind. But children can often disconcert us by liking something we think beyond them. In my later years I visited a Junior School (five to eleven) in a respectable suburb of London and listened to children saying poems which they had chosen for themselves. I heard several pieces of no special note, and was suddenly astonished when a boy of nine recited with simple feeling 'Tears, idle tears'. It was quite deeply moving. I asked the mistress if she had chosen the piece for him and she replied, 'I did not even know that he knew it'. I complimented the boy and added, 'But that is rather a sad poem to choose'. He replied quietly, 'I like sad poems'. There was no more to say. Probably there were some passages of which he could not have

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given a rational explanation, and certainly none should have been demanded of him or even offered him unless he had asked; but he knew it was a sad poem and that every touch in it expressed the sadness that appealed to him. So, in my opinion, he understood a poem that most of us would have thought too difficult. We must never be frightened by that word 'understanding' into restricting the range of children's reading. I left that school a sadder and a wiser man. I bless the fates that cast my lot among children of a wide range of years. They have not only taught me much, they have kept me human. Those gifted men, Lytton Strachey and T. S. Eliot, seem to think the fact that Matthew Arnold was an inspector of schools a kind of joke, decisive against his possession of high quality as poet and critic. They are wrong. I am sure that Matthew Arnold's enduring freshness is due in part, at least, to his humanizing contact with children and his sympathy with them. It would be interesting to make a list of writers whose work suffers from the kind of obtuseness and self-absorption which cannot survive the daily association with children. Their penetrating scrutiny is fatal to pose and pretence. I am proud to think that I followed Matthew Arnold's calling and certain that I am the better for my experience.

The second topic that invites discussion is the quality of the poems offered to children. Some people are decisive in this matter and declare that children must be given nothing but the 'best'. I hesitate, remembering that a poem which gave me the genuine thrill was *The Graves of a Household*, which nobody would call one of the best poems. It is not bad, it contains nothing that is vulgar or false. That it is conventional in diction is no great fault:

> The sea, the blue, lone sea hath one—
> He lies where pearls lie deep:

greater people have written worse lines than those. I suppose the charge we instinctively make against it is that the poetical

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vitality is feeble; but that is an adult judgement, not valid for children. And where are we to draw the line? The jingles and rhymes that delighted our earliest years are certainly not poetry of the first order. At what age does the 'best' become essential? Take, for instance, *Hiawatha*, which pleased me and has pleased a multitude of children since. I have heard scenes from it recited dramatically by children of seven with costumes and properties made by themselves under the teacher's direction. To forbid *Hiawatha* on the ground that Longfellow was a second-rate poet is sheer folly. 'Children should have nothing but the best.' Very well; for children *Hiawatha* is one of the best. It is a brave poem, containing nothing that is vulgar or spurious, nothing that will impede the growth of taste for better things. That is true of other poems by Longfellow, which are eminently suitable for children, as the poetry is held in rather a weak solution. I am inclined to think that insistence on the 'best' is the tabloid fallacy. Let us be sure that poetry for children contains poetical vitamins. The kind of poem that contains none is *A Lost Chord*, which is pietistic humbug. To give that to children is to put a lie into the soul.

XII

The third matter I want to mention briefly is more contentious and touches the debatable ground of so-called modernism in poetry. It can be safely declared as a general rule that children should be made acquainted with the poetry of their own time and not be restricted to the poetry of the past. It may also be declared as a general rule that children should know that poetry is poetry, and that present and past are categories of no importance for them. If they learn *Sir Patrick Spens*, they learn a good poem, and that is all that matters. Whether it was written four or five or six hundred years ago makes not the slightest difference to the quality of the poem. That may sound like a truism; but it is a truth of the highest importance. Denial of

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it means the distortion of absolute values. We are assured that poetry has lately conquered new territories in the lowest depths of the reader's consciousness, which is affected, without the aid of intellect, by phantasmagoria arising from the lowest depths of the writer's consciousness. In so far as this claim is true it is not new. Music, for instance, comes from a region beyond our knowing, affects us inexplicably, and, as I have already said, has no relation to the world of fact and experience. But wherever or whatever the source or origin of music may be, some music is good and some is bad. The Freudian analysis never attains to any criterion of artistic excellence. To it the best is like the worst. It is concerned solely with impulse, not with result. The source of poetic creation in the unconscious was discussed by Eneas Sweetland Dallas in his fragmentary book, *The Gay Science*, as long ago as 1866. He denied the Aristotelian doctrine of 'imitation', or, as we should now call it, representation, in the days when super-representation was the fashion. Why claim this as new and modern? In poetry, as in music, the exploration of the source of the impulse to create tells us absolutely nothing about the value of the creation. To assume a superiority of poetry which consciously bases itself in the unconscious is to confuse intention with result. This superiority, it is claimed, invalidates all other modes of poetry. Nonsense! Though poets of this kind believe they have dispensed with intellectual mediation, they are actually engaged in cerebration, not in creation, and give purely intellectual explanations of their artistic intention. They touch hands with the writers of laboratory-music. Their poems are no more pure poetry than scientific scales are pure music. Children are natural symbolists. To illustrate this I need go no further than Mrs Hemans:

> The sea, the blue, lone sea hath one—
> He lies where pearls lie deep:

The word 'pearls' was for me purely a symbol enforcing the significance of the word 'lone'. Never for a moment did I

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think of pearls as material objects—indeed I knew almost nothing about them. I had read of the diving of pearl-fishers, and the word 'pearls' combined with the word 'lone' therefore conveyed to me a sense of the deep, vast solitude of the ocean where the sailor's body lay. When Clarence narrates his dream of drowning and speaks of 'Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearls' the effect of the word is totally different. Here it stands for tangible, material objects and symbolizes the wasted, inaccesible wealth of the ocean bed. Children may be trusted to symbolize, without the aid of cerebral poetry.

Another demand, supposed to be a note of modernism, is that language should be austere, and not lush—that it should eschew poetic diction and prefer the common to the far-fetched word. New and modern? We might describe the history of poetry as the history of revolts against aureation. Who is more austere than Dante, whose almost terrifying restraint upon language produces one sure effect of the highest poetry, namely, that it penetrates us, pierces us, gives us a kind of wound?—

> Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia:
> Siena me fe', disfecemi Maremma.

Could any words say less—or more? Ruskin, writing long ago about the old Scottish ballads, justly says, 'The great poets of Scotland, like the great poets of all countries, never write dissolutely, but with a stern and measured meaning in every syllable'. The demand for a rejection of flowery diction could hardly be put more strongly than that. Really, we seem to be instructed nowadays by literary critics who have never read anything. Every real poet is a new and modern poet, who must create his own style and his own audience. His originality comes to him unsought, because he is himself—he is original because his dreams are not our dreams. That is the mark of true originality. The unnatural originality of sports and freaks is abhorrent alike in art and in nature.

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Children are not attracted by the products of cerebration or by false originality or by the diction that avoids bad poetry by becoming bad prose. What they need is really song, for they still inhabit the mysterious world to which music belongs. A true song makes us want to join in the singing. Have you noticed how little song there is in the world of to-day? We have immensely clever writers and composers, but no song. That is a grievous loss. Something has gone wrong in our souls if we can no longer sing. But we must see that the evil does not affect our children. They must have song. If writers of to-day cannot sing, we must go back to those who can. *The Ancient Mariner*, *Sennacherib* and *Hiawatha* were not the products of cerebration, they had been transfigured into song, and so won my youthful heart. Even the lighter poems I enjoyed had been magically touched. At an early stage in my reading I found the puns of *Nelly Gray* and *Sally Brown* delightful. Hood was certainly a poet who made words work for their keep, and as I was fond of words I enjoyed seeing them juggled with. We should let children have access to gay poems and nonsense verses, but we should beware of trying to force anything upon their liking. A child's response to what we think funny is unpredictable. *John Gilpin* left me unamused. I thought it far too long for its story, and the story did not seem funny to me. I have to confess that its celebrated pun passed unobserved.

XIII

Security of form counts for much with children, and so I was quickly captured by *Horatius*. There was a selection in the old volumes, but I needed no selection, for we had a whole volume of Macaulay's poems, and I disdained an abbreviation that did not begin with the tremendous lines,

> Lars Porsena of Clusium
> By the Nine Gods he swore.

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Who the Nine Gods were I did not know and never sought to know. That they were mysteriously Nine was enough for me. And then there were *Ivry*, *The Armada*, *The Last Buccaneer* and others, all crowded with allusions that had no meaning, but were symbols of abundant life. Who were the great Twin Brethren and the brood of false Lorraine? I did not know and did not care. It was enough that the poems were enriched by splendid names like waving flags and that the lines sang a song in which I could join. Do not suppose that a child needs to have allusions explained. He is not working for an examination, he is engaged in singing, he is still inhabiting the world of music. Presently there will come a time when his curiosity will awaken and he will begin to ask questions. Then, and not till then, you can unload your information. The grave music of *Hohenlinden*, a totally different kind of historical poem, gave me a deep thrill. The first stanza captured me at once. The alliteration (though the small boy knew nothing of that word) fell almost ominously on the ear, and the menacing line 'All bloodless lay the untrodden snow' created for the eye a scene of carnage by its very negations. Like my small boy of nine who gratified his liking for sad poems with 'Tears, idle tears', this small boy of the same age indulged his feeling for a scene and his apprehension of the terrible with the sombre effects of *Hohenlinden*. The same poet gave me an equally memorable sea-piece in *The Battle of the Baltic*. Less urgent, but very likeable, were 'Ye Mariners of England' and *Lord Ullin's Daughter*, the first appealing by its quality as song and the second by the roar of its tempest. In any account of poems that had special attraction of metre I must not fail to reckon *The Jackdaw of Rheims*, which delighted me by its rhymes, its rhythms, its story and its humorous mock-solemnity. I enjoyed the gruesomely funny pictures in the volume (I saw nothing horrible even in *The Auto da Fe*), but the other Legends did not attract me at that age. I think it a little odd that, highly sensitive as I was, I received no shock of pain from pictures with

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painful subjects. Thus, I remember when I was first taken to the National Gallery and saw a St Sebastian I was not in the least horrified. A picture to me was a picture, not a framed piece of reality. The ancient story of the little girl at the long-vanished Doré Gallery who complained to her mother that there was one poor lion who hadn't got a Christian to eat may have been invented, but it is true in essence. Pain, though a reality to children—think of toothache, for instance—seems divorced from reality in representation, whether as picture or as narrative.

But I must return to poetry and note some of my failures. Doyle's poem about my old monumental friend the *Birkenhead* disappointed me. What was wrong with it? I felt that it was just a set of statements that never rose up to a climax—I am using adult language to describe what was clearly felt by the boy, who knew quite well that it could not stand comparison with *Hohenlinden*. My first adventures with Wordsworth were unfortunate. *We are Seven* seemed to me just silly. *Fidelity* I was inclined to like. It was true and moving; but it stopped with its tale half-told. The hero is the dog, and the poet apparently leaves him where he is, for we hear nothing of his fate. To me that was a grave defect. I had the same feeling about Browning's *How they brought the Good News*. Well, what was the good news? We are not told. The poet begins a story and stops just when it becomes exciting. Why all this elaborate preparation for something that does not happen? As verse I thought it inferior to *Sennacherib*. This demand for an ending is mere childish literalness. I was more genuinely critical when I refused to accept a horrid piece called *Llewellyn and his Dog*. What disgusted me was not the painfulness of the story, but its stupidity. Gelert, Llewellyn's favourite hound, must certainly have been the friend and playmate of the little son, and therefore would not have killed and eaten him. Besides, how could the hound have devoured the child so completely that not even a fragment of clothing was left? Llewellyn called—no

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voice replied; yet the child is instantly awakened by Gelert's dying yell. Llewellyn found traces of blood, but followed them so imperfectly that he discovered neither wolf nor child. He cruelly killed Gelert, without giving him, so to speak, a dog's chance of leading the searcher to the place where the dead wolf lay, with the child most improbably lying by its side. I rejected the piece indignantly as an attempt to impose on me. Not a single fact would bear examination, not a single stanza had any kind of poetical merit. But in the past, pieces like this were regularly found in books for children. Tennyson's *The May Queen* had no interest for me. Who or what the May Queen was, what she had done, whether she lived or died, seemed totally unimportant. What appeared the silliest of all pieces was one called *The Bells* by E. A. Poe. I thought anyone could make up stuff like that.

It may seem from the examples quoted that I was not judging poetically—that I was put off by the matter. But my instinct was sound. In poetry the matter does not exist as such. It is a function of the poetical form—I do not mean any specific metrical form, but the general form that we accept as poetry. Poetry uses matter to get itself expressed. Thus, a mnemonic is not poetry; it is matter put into metrical form for the convenience of the memory. The difference between *Hohenlinden* and *The Loss of the Birkenhead* is that in the first all the matter has been transmuted into poetry, and in the second the matter is recited metrically. In other words, *Hohenlinden* is a poem and the *Birkenhead* is not. The Gelert piece is despicable from any point of view, and I mention it solely to record my instant rejection of it as a pretender. The assimilation of matter into form is a mark of true poetry, as we can see in the best ballads, which, at first sight, may seem to exist for the sake of the story. The truth is that the story exists for the sake of the ballad, and is memorable as a story because it has been transmuted into form. Told in prose as short and simple as the verse, most ballad-stories would be immemorable anecdotes.

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XIV

Of course it is not to be supposed that I arrived at convictions like these when I was a child. I did not think, I felt. I had an instinct for the good which rarely misled me. As I grew from seven to ten I developed a sense of style. Words, as words, not only multiplied, but took on richer tones of meaning. That seems a great claim to make for a child, but I should cite in support of it the crucial instance of *Hohenlinden*, which is a triumph of style, and which was a high spot of poetry for me even at that age. It seems clear that I had a precocity of apprehension where poetry was concerned. But I had no other precocity. As I have said, I took no interest in mechanical things, I never wanted to make anything, and never played with any kind of tools. By the time I was ten I had acquired such pieces as the Ocean and Waterloo stanzas from *Childe Harold*, the ghastly shipwreck from *Don Juan*, the great fight from *The Lady of the Lake*, *The Cloud*, *The Burial of Sir John Moore* and a terrible piece called *The Song of the Shirt* which horrified me. For the first time I learned what poverty meant. One of the less important poems I read tempts me to make a digression. A short time after the death of Hardy, a member of our regular corner group in the smoking-room of the Reform Club was describing the last visit he had paid to Hardy and his great disappointment with it. He could not get the old man to talk about anything. Hardy's mind was immovably fixed upon one subject, a poem about Mary Queen of Scots, which he had read when he was a boy and which had lately recurred to his memory. He could not remember the name of the author, or any actual lines, except the words 'The scene was changed', which came at regular intervals. He seemed almost passionately eager to recover that lost poem, and the visitor's attempts to divert him were made in vain. Hardy was plainly not attending, for he constantly broke in with questions about this vanished piece. Did the visitor know it or where it

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could be found? Alas, he did not, for he had never heard of it; and though he promised Hardy that he would make inquiries, he never succeeded in finding it. So he told us the story of his failure, and in that group of men there was not one who had ever met this poem—except myself, and I knew it, not because of any special literacy, but because I had read it as a child in one of those old miscellanies (where Hardy himself had probably met it) and could still quote some lines of it. The author is Henry Glassford Bell, an Edinburgh advocate who published a defence of Mary. If you hunt the Edinburgh bookstalls, you are fairly sure of lighting on a volume of Bell's once popular verse in the sixpenny box—he did not reach the south. But he is no poet, and the piece which the author of *The Dynasts* was so anxious to recover would certainly have proved a disappointment. It is just moderately good historical narrative in verse, something belonging to the voluminous mass of 'near-poetry' —an interesting subject, which deserves a treatise to itself. That by the way.

Among the pieces I have just named the Waterloo stanzas of Byron attracted me most deeply. They had the disturbing sense of menace, disaster and pathos which had already attracted me in *Hohenlinden*. I found them a satisfying example of what I have called style, the matching of serious matter with the right words. Just those words and no others could give me that sense of tragedy. Take the last two stanzas beginning thus:

> And Ardennes waves above them her green leaves,
> Dewy with Nature's tear-drops as they pass,
> Grieving, if aught inanimate e'er grieves,
> Over the unreturning brave....

There is nothing here that a sensitive child, accustomed to the use of words, cannot receive. No doubt a more austere taste might reject 'Dewy with Nature's tear-drops' as poetic diction; but there is an unquestionable liberty permitting a brief comparison which, if extended, might become offensive. We must not make austerity a kind of dowdiness. The poet himself

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instantly qualifies his own 'grieving'. I think the phrase is a fine humanizing touch. In Byron's stanzas there is no puzzle to be solved. The theme is tragic, the description vivid, the movement animated and the verse accomplished. I got the passage by heart and declaimed it with fervour. To this day I cannot think of it unmoved. I was still a small boy when I read the whole of *Childe Harold*. One famous name is absent from my list of poets, that of Shakespeare himself. I met several short passages, and passed them without notice. The one long passage in the miscellanies, the Arthur scenes from *King John*, utterly failed to move me. I think I found Arthur the kind of boy in whom I did not believe. His insistence on his princely rank seemed offensive. But my dislike rose to disgust at the words:

> When your head did but ache,
> I knit my handkercher about your brows,
> The best I had—a princess wrought it me,
> And I did never ask it you again.

I thought those last two lines simply horrid. Shakespeare was not revealed to me till I encountered him in the theatre.

XV

Thus, during the years from seven to ten, I had amassed quite a large store of poems that really meant something to me. I knew that poetry did something to my feelings that prose did not. It had an immediacy of effect—it penetrated, it pierced, it gave that curious thrill which I had associated with swinging.

> The sea, the blue, lone sea hath one—
> He lies where pearls lie deep.

No prose could hit one with such an instant stroke as that, no mere description could create such a heart-moving effect. I had acquired, as well, a fund of general information from the miscellanies and the many other volumes I had read. But you are not to think of me as a stuffy little bookworm. I had (and

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retained) a passion for out-of-doors. The Park was inexhaustible—a true region of romance; and as I grew older I could go through the Park to Blackheath (where I afterwards lived for many years), a vast stretch of common, not then so fringed with desirable villa residences as it afterwards became. Wide and vast and empty it seemed to me. Away to the south lay the village; to the east rose Shooter's Hill with its thick woods. Now the place looks as if a tidal wave had swept across the country for miles and left a thick deposit of mean little houses from Shooter's Hill to Eltham and beyond. The emptiness of Blackheath suddenly filled on Bank Holidays with all the fun of the fair, and crowds of people from Deptford and the Old Kent Road gathered there for enjoyment. On those days I was not allowed to go alone, I was taken by my father and my sisters. Hoarse-voiced men shouted the attractions of their rival amusements. Youths and girls wore each other's hats and shrieked with glee. I was pleasantly excited by the spectacle of the crowd and the noise of the holiday-makers and the showmen. A Punch and Judy show gave me infinite delight. Next day, all was gone but the litter, and the Heath resumed its normal vacancy and silence.

I suppose I missed something by not going to school; but of this I grow doubtful as I read modern biographies and autobiographies, in which schools are generally depicted as abominable places, failing in the first requirement of schools, namely, that they should teach something. I was to have a happy experience later; but meanwhile I was, like Gibbon, an early and invincible reader, pursuing my own pleasures in my own way and at my own time, uninterrupted by the changes of subject demanded by a time-table. This long period of freedom was the happy result of early illness and alleged delicacy of health. The lack of schooling was not all the loss it might have been. At least there was no one to meddle with my mind. Should I have gained my unimpeded love of poetry had I gone to school at seven? I enjoyed complete liberty and suffered

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from no repressions. From the biographies and autobiographies I gather that the lives of children were made miserable by three sorts of tyrant—the parent, the parson, the pedant. I escaped that entirely. No one ever told me not to read certain books or forced the reading of others upon me. No child could have been more completely 'let alone'. As I have said, this absence of interference was probably due to some one's conviction that I was destined for early death; but, whatever the cause, it was the best thing that could have happened to me. I feel very grateful to the simple home in which I was so well cared for, so patiently borne with, so unrestricted in liberty. At last, when I had turned ten, I was allowed to go to school. Though delicate, I was not in the least sickly. Whatever was supposed to be lying in wait for me round the corner made no appearance, so off to school I went with great delight, only to encounter an unforeseen humiliation: I could not write! I do not mean that I could not compose (oddly enough I never wanted to compose), I mean that I could not perform the act of formal penmanship. That had been overlooked. I had scribbled with pencils and crayons, but I had never practised formal writing, so the pen was a new and awkward instrument for me. I was afflicted by things called copy-books and troubled in mind because I could not imitate the copper-plate lettering given as examples. Nobody made the least attempt to teach me, nobody took the letters to pieces and made me practise the few elements out of which our script is formed. This my eldest sister did for me—she being now returned from Germany, full of enthusiasm for German literature, and especially for something called *Faust* by the strangely named Goethe. Thanks to her patience I began to make progress; but it took me some time to acquire a hand that was natural and easy. Nowadays children are taught to make running patterns with the elements of script, and so learn to write almost without conscious effort. Whether the sense of defeat caused by my struggles with the pen affected

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my mental development is a matter I leave to the curiosity of psychologists. What has to be recorded is that the year from ten to eleven, the year of my first schooling, is so unremarkable as to count for nothing. It brought a change in my interests. I could tell a much longer tale about my first adventures in poetry. But those adventures ceased. A curtain fell; and of the period from eleven to sixteen I have no poetical history to record. Here, then, for a time I must speak of other things.

XVI

I had now reached what someone has happily called the age of the gang, and I was singularly fortunate in my gang. After I had turned eleven I left my sheltered home for the first time and entered a great and spacious school. I spent a few probationary months in the lower school and was then promoted to the second class in the intensely selected upper school. Here were boys with intellectual qualities much above the normal and all overflowing with ideas and projects. I discovered new sources of interest, one of them being *The Boy's Own Paper*, never sufficiently to be praised. I should also add that I became an addict to *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, and followed with delight the adventures of the family. I also banqueted on 'bloods'—*Deadwood Dick*, the interminable adventures of Jack Harkaway, and *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. There was no harm in any of them.

After one year in the second class I was moved into the first, and there spent three lively, happy years. At no time did I encounter bullying or any kind of cruelty. I seemed to have the Park and the River and the whole dome of heaven as my boundaries, and, for the first time, I began to observe the stars intelligently, watching their gradual movement as the year swept slowly round in those timeless days of youth. I learned to identify the constellations and the first-magnitude stars from a large old-fashioned celestial globe which, with a less interesting

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terrestrial globe, adorned the class-room. Before us, on the wall, hung a painted portrait of Sir Isaac Newton, bearing the inscription 'Knowledge is Power'. Knowledge of a kind began to accumulate. Special stress was laid on mathematics, for which I seemed to have an aptitude. I worked rapidly through Todhunter's Euclid (six books, and parts of the eleventh and twelfth), Hamblin Smith's Algebra, and a book of plane trigonometry by an author whose name I have forgotten. The mathematical side of physics we studied as statics, dynamics and hydrostatics. When I was fifteen I had my first lessons in the calculus.

But where, it may be asked, did the humanities find a place in this orgy of mathematics? The only foreign language taught us was French. After beginning humbly with Henri Bué, I was promoted to Brachet. We had composition in the form of a book of anecdotes compiled by the once celebrated 'Max O'Rell', and these we had to translate into French. We were expected to do French reading in our private study time, and the first volume inflicted on me was *La Jeune Sibérienne*. I have never loathed any book so much. What was demanded of us was the utmost strictness of grammar, especially in the formation and the sequence of tenses; what was not demanded of us was any proficiency in speech. I soon read and wrote French with fair correctness; I rarely spoke it or heard it spoken. I make a little parenthetic jump forward out of my boyhood to the year 1893, when the Comédie Française gave a season in London. Here, thought I, the winner of prizes in French can get a new form of theatrical amusement; but to my great consternation and humiliation I found that I could scarcely understand a single word spoken on the stage. However I haunted the gallery of Drury Lane till I got a few sentences into my unpractised ear, and, incidentally, received a liberal education in the art of acting from the performances of such men as Mounet-Sully, Got, Paul Mounet, Le Bargy and other famous actors long since passed away. I now revert to school,

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where, strange as it may seem, I never had any regular lessons in English. We were given three books, Morell's Grammar, Nichol's primer of English Composition and Stopford Brooke's primer of English Literature, from which, in our private study time, we were supposed to imbibe all that English boys need know about their own language. Stopford Brooke was indeed a fount of pleasure from which I drank eagerly, never dreaming that a day would come when I should be asked to write a concluding chapter to the little volume, for Stopford Brooke had ended his survey at 1832. Literature itself was represented by a few plays of Shakespeare (Clarendon Press editions), which, with curious denseness, I failed to recognise as poetry. We were expected to memorize certain scenes, and were occasionally called upon to prove the fact of memorization by public recitation. We never read any play through in class nor was any read to us. Shakespeare meant nothing to me till I received a glorious vision of *The Merchant of Venice* at the Lyceum in Jubilee year. Such was our teaching in French and English in the eighteen-eighties. I wonder if it was any better in schools of greater renown? There is evidence that it wasn't.

XVII

We were the strangest class imaginable. The normal time spent in it was three years. We had no time-table, except for certain lessons taken by other teachers. Music and drawing were taught by external persons very efficiently, though drawing then meant South Kensington stuff. I was not good at drawing, but I never found any difficulty in reading and memorizing music. For ordinary subjects we had our own text-books and a good reference library, and we set ourselves our own assignments of work. We were taught, or rather untaught, by the headmaster, a gifted mathematician with a special interest in astronomy. But he was immersed in his own pursuits, and rarely gave lessons, though they were memorable events when

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they occurred. He assured us that the most profitable way of learning was to work out things for ourselves. So we taught each other in the most free and easy fashion. Sometimes he would exclaim, 'Any difficulties?' If we were so incautious as to take any difficulties to him they were made so simple that we felt like fools for troubling him. It is characteristic of the man and the regimen that he declared one day we should all know how to play chess. So, by blackboard diagrams he taught us the position and value of the pieces and how they should move. We therefore acquired boards and men and began to play. Sometimes he would set and solve a simple problem. And then chess faded from his mind, but not from ours. After a night of heavy gale he showed us how the anemometer at the Observatory worked and made its records. He told us that the metal of the future was aluminium and that a fortune awaited those who could extract it cheaply and plentifully. Further he said that existing steam engines would give place to much smaller and more powerful engines of electrically exploded vapour. This was in the mid-eighties, when (as far as I know) the only engines of this type existing were the Otto gas engines, which he described as merely rudimentary forms of the future engines. It is interesting to note that *The Clipper of the Clouds*, that most fascinating story of the first flying machine, appeared in *The Boy's Own Paper* during 1886; but Jules Verne built his ship of compressed paper (though one of the unwilling passengers had an aluminium snuff-box) and his power came, not from an engine, but from piles and accumulators. So our prophetic headmaster had not much fact to inspire his visions. I think of him, not as a teacher, but as an animating presence, stimulating to intellectual adventure and intolerant of shirking and the half-achieved. Later I was to receive teaching that was more thorough in the technical sense, but nothing that gave me the same kind of inspiration. It was just mechanically efficient. The secret of great teaching is what you are, not what you know. He knew

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a great deal; but it was what he was that mattered. To choose people and pump information into them is not the way to make teachers. Teachers should be encouraged to develop themselves as persons, as living influences, and to be dissatisfied by the mere negative acquisition of knowledge. This is a point to which those responsible for the training of teachers should give close attention. I must not leave unmentioned the master of the second class, who taught me for a year, and continued throughout to teach us French. He, too, was a character, but of a different order. He was gentle, kind, and almost emphatic in denying his importance. One of his oddities was a habit of referring to himself by name in the third person. 'Yes,' he would say, in response to our respectful greeting when he came in, 'it's only old Baxter, or Billy, as I expect you call him.' And this he did without any sacrifice of dignity: we felt there were reserves. I never once heard him raise his voice in anger or reproof. He would correct us apologetically, as if the fault were his. 'Of course', he would say when I had made a howler in French, 'that sounds quite intelligible, but the French wouldn't like it—they might even think it wrong.' One would not call him an animating presence, he was more like an affectionate influence. Nobody dreamed of ragging him in any way, for we knew his very gentleness would fill us with shame. I think of him with affection to this day. There are more ways than one of being a great teacher. Later he became headmaster, and I am sure he was successful. Then he, too, went, and this extraordinary upper school of two classes was enlarged and efficiently reorganized. That, happily, I know only by report. The Golden Age was gone. I rejoice that I lived in it. The very school itself has vanished from the inspiring surroundings of its old home, and its place knows it no more.

As you will understand, our work was done at high tension. There was no slacking, simply because slacking could not exist in that electrified atmosphere. We stimulated each other and shared our resources. I made three firm friendships with

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boys rather older than myself, a difference that was entirely to my advantage. Athos I first got to know because he taught me the theory and practice of extracting cube roots. Porthos, big and exuberant, was tireless in devising amusements. Aramis was a schoolboy atheist—no, he grandly called himself an agnostic. He had an older brother out in the world, who wrote him long argumentative letters which he read to Athos, Porthos and me—for I need scarcely say that we formed a secret brotherhood, with signs, passwords and a mysterious script: had we not read *The Cryptogram* and *The Gold Bug*? The brother also sent Aramis books, one of which was *The Origin of Species*, which we solemnly read as a sure antidote to the poison of scriptural superstition—that was how Aramis (or, rather, his brother) talked. But I was unconvinced, and refused to give up my superstition. What if species had slowly differentiated and man had descended from an extinct ancestor: was that not in obedience to law—the same kind of law that governed the movements of the stars? The writer of *Genesis* told the legends as he knew them: he could not tell something that had not yet been discovered. My respect for law was not original; it was derived from the celebrated passage in Hooker, which I had found somewhere. So Aramis failed to convert me. His brother did something far more useful than preach agnosticism, he sent Aramis the little volumes of a series of books then appearing under the name of Cassell's National Library, and I eagerly borrowed these and greatly extended the range of my reading. There was time for everything. We had the usual two formal day sessions of school, and we had our private study time, quite unsupervised, from six to eight. But the class-rooms were always open and accessible at odd times. Having finished our allotted tasks in the evenings we diverted ourselves in various ways. Porthos introduced us to toy theatricals. We bought a grand proscenium and gaudily coloured it. We bought plays and characters, and the latter, duly painted, were mounted on cardboard and thrust on the stage from the side in metal

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holders with long wire handles. In his famous essay Stevenson declares that no child could 'twice court the tedium, the worry and the long-drawn disenchantment of an actual performance'. He is utterly wrong. Probably he had to play alone. We played together, each reading or reciting his allotted part or parts. For us, the play was the thing, the colouring and cutting out were merely the preliminaries. Our disappointment lay in the short life of the theatre. Characters got broken or lost, and finally the proscenium fell into ruins. But it was a great lark.

XVIII

My recreative reading during this period was almost entirely in prose. The child with a precocious appreciation of poetry vanished and was succeeded by the boy with an insatiable appetite for romance. I tore my way through Marryat, Kingston, Ballantyne, Mayne Reid, and Fenimore Cooper, and then made the immense discovery of Dumas, whose works (in English) filled a long row in the large school library. I became unofficial assistant to the master who had charge of the library, and could therefore borrow books as often as I liked. I specially loved long books, and so the serials of Dumas were entirely to my taste. I thought *Monte-Cristo* had the ideal length for a single story, and I totally disagree with Stevenson, who maintains that the story really ends with the discovery of the treasure, the long-drawn tale of revenge being tedious. Having worked steadily through Dumas, I turned to another long row, containing the military novels of Captain James Grant, now forgotten, but not by me. I must be one of the last persons living who read any quantity of the innumerable romances of G. P. R. James. Ainsworth, Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins, all fully represented, were eagerly swallowed. At fifteen I could have passed an examination in Wilkie Collins, including such lesser works as *Basil*, *Hearts and Science* and *No Name*. Some of his tales I have never read since

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that time, yet I remember them clearly. The great and good Sir Walter was known to me in his adventurous and historical stories (*Old Mortality* was a special favourite), but not in his more tragic tales. I have often wondered what instinct guided my choice. I recall, as a curious fact, that I heard Melba in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and saw Irving in *The Master of Ravenswood* before I had read Scott's novel. In recent years of denigration there was an anti-Scott agitation. I refuse to hear a word against him. He has magnitude and its correlative magnanimity, both qualities very much to seek in these days of the little man. *Waverley*, with its occasional lapses and its want of certainty in touch, was indeed 'new writing', an attempt at an entirely new kind of fiction, and it contains some tragic scenes that Scott himself never surpassed. *The Antiquary* and *Guy Mannering* are two of the books that I can always pick up at any time and read with intense enjoyment. Of Dickens I read nothing but *Nicholas Nickleby*, and did not like it much. I was put off (as I still am) by Smike. Dickens was reserved to be a splendid revelation in my adult years. And now I come to the greatest glory of all. Surely no boys of any period ever had such magnificent thrills as we received in the eighties from *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*, from *King Solomon's Mines*, *She* and *Allan Quatermain*. The Stevenson books were highly exciting stories of a past age; the main enchantment of the Rider Haggard inventions lay in the fact that they were contemporary—they were happening now, in an Africa still mysterious. Then came the scramble for Africa, and the continent was ruined for ever by hired explorers and company-promoters. Where now could a new Rider Haggard lay the scene of a new *She*? We have uncovered the world so nakedly that there is nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon. An honoured name shall end this digression. With our heads crammed full of Stevenson and Rider Haggard, we encountered a new and thrilling story called *Dead Man's Rock* signed mysteriously 'Q'. Here was a problem. Who was Q? After

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much solemn discussion we decided, on stylistic grounds, that he was certainly not Rider Haggard, but was probably Stevenson, hiding himself under an alias. Not a bad shot for schoolboys, as Q was afterwards chosen to complete one of Stevenson's half-told tales. That I should become this unknown person's friend and associate in later days was not then imaginable. Here, with our last discussion, I bid farewell to Athos, Porthos and Aramis. This is not the time nor the place for musing on schoolboy friendships, which, in the nature of things, are rarely enduring. My Three Musketeers taught me much that I should have learned less pleasantly and less quickly without their seniority. I had spent a secluded childhood; they drew me out of my shell, and taught me to look more largely on the world. Life was about to change for me very suddenly and grimly. Thanks to them I was ready to face the future. So, Hail and Farewell!

XIX

I have tried to present the figure of a child in whom a love of poetry developed at a very early age, and in whom that love fell into abeyance when other interests were kindled. I suppose there is nothing unusual in this kind of development. In my early days I had been devoted to poetry, which is a matter of the spirit, demanding no aid from reason. From eleven onwards the reasoning being came to life and found new excitement in mathematics, with romantic diversions. In short, I was growing up. With diffidence I suggest that I had found another source of emotional satisfaction—in religion. In earlier days I had taken church-going as a matter of course. No one had ever forced religion on me, and so a sense of religion grew of its own accord. The words of the Prayer Book became strangely beautiful, giving me the thrill that I had first received from poetry. When I had turned fourteen I was confirmed, and felt I had taken a serious step in life. I shall make no attempt to discuss here that most delicate matter, a boy's religious ex-

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perience; I mention it solely to show that I had to bear none of the sufferings that seem to have befallen others less fortunate. In the usual sense I was not 'pi'; my feelings were entirely private. I turned to religion to satisfy a personal need; and in the church services I found a strange sense of release that was new to me. If you ask me to be particular and say exactly what it was that I felt a release from, I cannot answer, because I do not know. As you will imagine, the agnostic arguments of Aramis had no power whatsoever over me. I will not prolong this digression, which, however, forms a natural part of a personal record, as I believe that a sense of worship and the appeal of the liturgy mysteriously gave to the growing boy what poetry had given to the child. They were symbols of another order. It was happily at this stage of my development that I fell under the charm of *John Inglesant*. I think no single book had so great an effect on me.

That my literary life has no public importance does not alter the fact that it was of immense importance to me personally. Yet it will be observed that I received no literary education whatever. A strict drilling in French grammar was the only linguistic training I received as a boy. Of French literature I learned little beyond some poems and famous scenes from the classical drama, with rules for reading French verse. The only exact discipline to which I was submitted was mathematical, and that was very thorough and unusually enlightened for its time. So I have never been very tolerant of the high claims made for particular subjects as 'the best' means of training the young. The well-meaning people who talk of education as if it were a substance distributable by coupon in large or small quantities never exhibit any understanding of the truth that you cannot teach anybody anything that he does not want to learn. If a pupil wants to learn, he is already half-way to learning before he is taught. If he does not want to learn, he cannot be taught, however many years you add to his school life. Education has become fatally entangled with politics, and

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we hear demands for 'equal opportunities for all' and a 'higher education for all'. Egalitarianism is the current political doctrine, and education the latest panacea. But as a matter of sheer material fact there cannot be equal opportunities for all and there cannot be higher education for all. What should be demanded is a much better *lower* education for all, especially in speech and language, both of which have been grossly and criminally neglected. When primary education is really and fundamentally primary, and when artificial obstacles are removed, we may look for more progress, but not for much. Many people are simply not educable. They are by nature resistant to any form of education and whether they are kept at school till they are sixteen or sixty they will acquire nothing —except resentment. They cannot even associate with others on natural easy terms—a terrible disability; for of all the forces that go to shape us none is more potent than association. Initial handicaps are not always injurious. I began with the handicap of physical delicacy and was deprived of early schooling. I cannot think I lost much. I might have benefited from association with children of my own age, or I might not. Who can say? When I did go to school the benefit of association was very great; but I was then old enough to profit by it. I have long been convinced that the highest education is that which we give ourselves and each other. The right business of schools is to provide the means of natural development. More they cannot do; less they dare not do.

XX

At fifteen and a half my happy school-days were abruptly cut short, and I found myself committed to a new and unforeseen life, at first dingy, dismaying and distressing, but at least enlightened by the necessity for continued study. For me the change was a great shock; but by this time I had, so to speak, found myself, thanks to the invigorating intellectual atmo-

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sphere of school and to the formative friendship of Athos, Porthos and Aramis. Instead of giving way to despair, I began to consider what I could gather from the wreck of certain hopes which I had entertained and which now proved beyond the possibility of fulfilment. My new life appeared to be dominated by perpetual examinations, weekly, monthly, yearly. In the distance loomed something called the Scholarship examination, upon which my future depended; but meanwhile I was set to prepare for the old Matriculation examination of the old London University and made my first acquaintance with the classical languages. I had already acquired some Latin in a curious way. My friend Athos was a Roman Catholic. Having become intensely interested in my own Prayer Book, I naturally became curious about his, which, of course, was *The Garden of the Soul*. I discovered that some parts of our services were alike, and began to learn the Latin forms. I went with him (quite irregularly) to his church on Crooms Hill, and heard what they sounded like. Then I got a copy of Smith's *Principia Latina*, and learned the elements of accidence. Thus I began Latin with the church pronunciation, and had to unlearn it when I was regularly taught, for the 'restored' pronunciation had not then come in, and did not till my pupilage was over.

I must not be tempted into reminiscences of those very interesting adolescent years, which were at first for me a time of struggle and almost of defeat. My life seemed to have suddenly turned grey. I had passed into an intellectual atmosphere which was dull and depressing. Gone were the times of happy adventures and discoveries for their own sakes. The phantom of eternal examination brooded over the place. As examinations had to be passed, we spent our time in being examined so that we should be ready for examination. Whether this state of things is common in all schools that take examinations seriously I do not know. What I do know is that it is the worst possible way of preparing for examinations. Pupils

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are made dull and apathetic instead of being kept intellectually alive. It fell to my lot in later years to prepare adult students for examinations, and our method was to forget all about examinations and to take our work as a pleasure. The pupils were kept interested—and they passed their examinations. In my new school, where nothing was done unless it 'paid' for examination purposes, I did not prosper until I began to rebel and go my own way. In such subjects as French and mathematics I was far ahead of my fellow-students. I found I had acquired enough mathematics to cover the requirements of my whole student period, so, like Gibbon, 'I relinquished for ever the pursuit of the Mathematics' and returned to poetry as if there had been no severance of our loves. For the first time I began to receive lessons in English. But as 'English' meant the humbug of parsing, analysis and paraphrase, it was useless to me, and, moreover, it was very badly taught. Fortunately my mind was maturing in its own way, and I suffered no harm from these dreadful lessons in English given by people devoid of a sense of language. I found my task-work so much less exacting than I expected, that I had plenty of time for private reading as well as for frequent visits to the play and the opera, which now began to contribute much to my intellectual growth.

XXI

I returned, as I have said, to poetry, feeling sure that here was my real world. I suppose that at some time in youth every one encounters a book or a work of creative art which has a definite effect upon his life, either in shaping his spiritual growth or, more simply, in setting the immediate direction of his interests. For me, at the right time, the right books came; but I had first to endure an unhappy time of doubt and darkness. The sudden change from my brilliant school to my drab and dingy den of examinations plunged me for a time in deep perplexity. I was not prospering intellectually. I was being

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led implacably and stupidly towards the Matriculation and Scholarship examinations—both of which I passed creditably, I add, lest I seem to be apologizing for 'missing my first'. But I did not want to be led to examinations; I wanted to be beckoned upwards and on. I was turned sixteen and approaching seventeen, and there was no Pillar of Fire to lead me, amid the encircling gloom. Do not think that I am magnifying trifles and growing tragic about nothing. I had reached a crucial age, at which one either takes life seriously or goes adrift; and it seemed that, instead of being guided and enlightened, I was being forcibly held down to the swotting of dates in history and the fudging of exercises in spurious grammar. My teachers appeared to think that swotting was all that mattered, and, no doubt, had they been challenged, would have replied by ingeminating 'Examinations, Examinations!' And then, when I felt lost in the dark, I encountered two books which suddenly opened a door and showed me the way I was to travel. They were the first volume of Ward's *English Poets* and the first volume of Henry Morley's *English Writers*. Unmomentous names they no doubt seem, but to me they meant salvation. Does it matter whence the call comes, as long as the call is heard? These books are now less known than they were, so I must say a word about them. *The English Poets* edited by T. Humphry Ward was a work in four volumes containing a collection of representative extracts from the English poets, beginning with Chaucer and proceeding chronologically to Wordsworth. The fourth volume was afterwards enlarged, and, much later, a fifth volume was added bringing the selections to the eve of the present age. Each selection was made by a writer then held to have a special competence, who also contributed a critical account of his author. A general introduction, afterwards published as *The Study of Poetry*, appeared in the first volume. The author was Matthew Arnold, whose sudden death had made his name familiar to me. The advent of that volume of the English poets at that time was miraculously happy. I had

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been a tumultuous reader. As a child I had read poetry widely and even wildly, liking or disliking with uninstructed taste, and never attempting to form a pattern of what I read. The older boy's prose reading was more orderly, because it was mainly a series of progressive enthusiasms for certain authors whom I was fortunately able to read in long, complete sets. For several years I had read scarcely any poetry, and I had now reached the age when spiritual and emotional development demanded something that poetry was specially fitted to give. The lack of this was the main cause of my unhappiness, and I had not the sense to recognize it. What I needed was a guide. Perhaps at a public school I might have found such a guide. Perhaps not: the biographies and autobiographies are ominously inconclusive on this matter. At my school there were certainly no such guides. I acquit them all of any dalliance with poetry. That any of them had ever at any time read a poem for its own sake is inconceivable. In their eyes, 'notes' were far more precious than texts. Thus, as I have said, the advent of Ward's first volume at that time was miraculously happy. I pored over Matthew Arnold's essay. There can be few people to whom it did more good than it did to me. Here, for the first time in my life, someone was talking to me about poetry in a charming, conversational way, which was not only a new pleasure, but a piece of salutary education. This volume of Ward, beginning with Chaucer and proceeding to Chaucer's English and Scottish successors, contained much that was too remote to give me pleasure; but from the Ballads on to Donne (most inadequately represented) everything was exciting and stimulating, and gradually awoke in me a desire and a purpose.

XXII

The second book that I found a formative influence was, as I have said, the first volume of Henry Morley's *English Writers*. I deeply regret that I had no opportunity of meeting this large-minded and great-hearted scholar, for I think I owe more to him

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than to any other teacher. Strangely enough I never read his most famous and popular volume, *A First Sketch of English Literature*. I knew him from boyhood as the editor of that wonderful weekly series of little volumes, Cassell's National Library, which, in paper covers at threepence and in cloth at sixpence, brought much of the world's great literature within the reach of every reader. Then came Morley's Universal Library (Routledge) in larger volumes at a shilling. There were nearly fifty of them, and I doubt if a shilling ever bought so much. Earlier he had edited for Cassell's the five massive volumes called the Library of English Literature, each with a separate title, the whole forming a vast anthology of astonishing range. He had begun writing a history of English literature some years before, but later recast it and began to publish it in attractive volumes called *English Writers*. The first appeared in 1887, the eleventh, and last, in 1895, Morley having died in 1894 with his great task unfinished. Later research and discoveries have naturally made a fifty-year-old book out-of-date in many details, but the main body of the work is sound. I doubt if any one man has done more to diffuse a love and knowledge of English literature; for Morley did not propagate opinions, he gave information illustrated by copious quotations. To me his first volume opened a new world of which I knew nothing—the world of Old English literature, and the reading of it stimulated the desire and purpose awakened by Ward. You are to suppose me at seventeen, the age of vows and resolutions. I determined that my main object in life should be to grow as fully acquainted as possible with the whole of English poetry and with some of its greatest prose, and that this object should be pursued for my personal delight, without reference to my daily occupation. This resolution at once solved my difficulties and relieved my distress. Swotting for examinations was relegated to a minor place and therefore disappears from the story. Henceforward I would lead two lives, one of which should be literary, and my own. That

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resolve was made after my renewed acquaintance with poets in Ward and Morley, and, unlike many youthful vows, it was kept.

But I was never a slave to a system. Other languages and other kinds of reading were fitted normally into my scheme of life. I had discovered Booksellers' Row, now long vanished. I had gone there first for text-books, but I soon found myself drawn to other shops. One, the name of which I have forgotten, displayed many paper-covered books, especially the publications of John Dicks, which included a vast range of novels at sixpence (discount price, fourpence-halfpenny) and innumerable plays at a penny each. By some mystery of publishing which I have never understood you could buy a set of twelve bound volumes called *Dicks' British Drama* at one shilling a volume, containing no less than two hundred and forty plays, not one of them by Shakespeare! All the major and minor dramatists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are there, and some of the nineteenth, for the very last play is *The Polish Jew*, the English original of *The Bells*, with which Irving had conquered the town. At that shop I bought my first copy of Rabelais and *The Decameron*, and, as a set off, my first Tolstoys in the bad early versions. Another fascinating shop, right at the west end of the Row was Denny's, which had (as all booksellers should) a large outside display, so that one could actually handle attractive volumes without committing one's self to purchase. There I bought Bayard Taylor's *Faust* and Cary's *Dante* (Chandos Classics). I still possess both those volumes and the twelve of the *British Drama*, and cherish them for the sake of their associations. Later I bought there a volume of essays which looked very attractive. It was called *Impressions and Opinions* by George Moore, a writer whose name had become vaguely familiar to me. As the book was quite cheap I thought I would discover for myself what it was like. The reading of it gave me a salutary shaking up and taught me the necessity of thinking for myself. At my age, and with a large programme

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of reading before me, there was some danger that I might fall into the easy habit of taking other people's opinions as final truth. George Moore was the first writer who taught me to challenge opinions and to discover whether they were true for me. I think Moore would have been annoyed to learn that he had been an influence for good in the life of a young man! Moore introduced me to some famous writers then quite unknown to me. I might point out that critics during the last few years who have become eloquent about Rimbaud seem to be unaware that he was discussed fully by George Moore in 1891.

XXIII

But before I became acquainted with Moore I had a tremendous theatrical experience in 1891 which left an ineffaceable impression on my feelings about the current drama. By great good fortune I was given a ticket for the celebrated first performance of *Ghosts* by a Norwegian dramatist named Henrik Ibsen. Here again was a writer of whom I had vaguely heard, and of whom hard things were being said. The impact of *Ghosts* upon me was simply tremendous. I confess at once that there were parts of it I could not follow. Why, for instance, was there so much talk about the insurance of the Orphanage? One knew for certain that it was going to be burned down, and so the actual fire seemed to me an anti-climax. Another difficulty was the character of Pastor Manders. Was he nothing but a gullible fool and dolt? If so, why was Mrs Alving in love with him? She was a great woman and must have known that he was only the image of a man uttering appropriate clerical sentiments. That, certainly, is how I saw him. But my chief difficulty was the nature of Oswald's malady. How could a doctor in Paris foretell his end, and say that he was born 'worm-eaten' and talk about the sins of the fathers. Cases of inherited paralysis and insanity of this kind are extremely rare; moreover Regina, already like her father in

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character, was apparently in robust bodily health. The truth, or part of the truth, is that I was utterly ignorant of what the disease was. I ought not to have been ignorant, for I was within a week or so of eighteen, and it should surely have been somebody's duty—preferably a doctor's—to make me aware of such dangers. As I look back upon the performance across the gulf of fifty years and more, I think that what gripped my attention was the powerful crescendo of tragedy. After a quiet beginning the intensity steadily grew with the story of Mrs Alving's long martyrdom to the thrilling moment when she and the Pastor, sitting in the drawing-room, hear from the dining-room the voices of the 'ghosts'. Thence, to the appalling end, the grip never once relaxed, and the details I have noted as difficulties vanished in the power of the whole. Here on the stage we had been shown, not a piece of theatrical complication nicely worked out to an agreeable end, but a glimpse of the terrible truth about life. That was another salutary lesson for me. A few weeks before, I had seen at the Haymarket, in the days of Mr Beerbohm Tree, a play called *The Dancing Girl*, by Henry Arthur Jones, and I had thought it quite a pleasant entertainment. After seeing *Ghosts* I recognized that *The Dancing Girl* was nothing but theatrical humbug—an elaborate attempt to present as life what was no more than a bag of very pretentious tricks. Never again would I be so deceived. I could enjoy *Diplomacy*, because, though it was a bag of tricks, it was a bag of very effective tricks, and I could enjoy *The Bells* and *Louis XI*, because they were not really plays at all, but mere texts for a display of *virtuoso* acting. I did not disdain the lighter entertainments, and I was just in time to see Fred Leslie and Nellie Farren at the old Gaiety and J. L. Toole at his own dingy little theatre. The last play I saw there was an agreeable farce, *Walker, London*, by a new writer named J. M. Barrie. I was astonished to find that *Ghosts* was universally denounced as a shameless piece of indecency which ought to call forth upon all who had taken

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part in it the utmost penalties of the law, and still more astonished to find that this opinion was shared by those who had neither seen nor read it, and had no intention of seeing or reading it. When I innocently asked how they had formed their opinion, I was told that *The Daily Telegraph* said so. *The Daily Telegraph*, with Clement Scott denouncing Ibsen and Joseph Bennett denouncing Wagner, industriously provided respectable people with respectable opinions. Has the blind faith of the public in periodicals, daily or weekly, been shaken? Not in the least! If anything, we are more credulous than ever and more imposed upon by sheer impudence. But I had received a valuable lesson in the danger of trying to form opinions without full possession of the facts.

XXIV

I have diverged from poetry to the modern drama because I wanted to show that, however far I was committed to a study of the past, I was fully aware of what was happening in the literature of my own time. I have said that as a child I belonged to the Jingo period. As a youth in the later teens I belonged to the Ibsen period, and I read everything of his that had been translated. I had formed a close friendship with someone three years older than myself, and through him I made my next thrilling acquaintance with poets, with Keats and Shelley, of whom he possessed volumes and I did not, though I hastened to acquire them. I remember well the excitement with which I read the *Ode to the West Wind* in the intervals of a concert at the Guildhall School of Music. I swallowed Keats at one gulp; I absorbed Shelley less easily. The lyrical pieces, long or short, I found enchanting; but I found little to enchant me in *Queen Mab*, in *The Witch of Atlas*, in the adventures of Laon and Cythna (however entitled) and even in *Alastor*. To this day I am imperfect in my admiration for these works. The immense discovery of Wordsworth

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belongs to the twenties, and therefore finds no place in this record. So my acquaintance with poets grew steadily wider. My friend, who had vast and almost epical literary ambitions which came to nothing, encouraged me to write verse of my own, and I did so, quite consciously for practice. I favoured the sonnet, as that gave me a definite pattern to fill. But I went further and wrote a long blank verse fragment on Ugolino to which I grandly gave the Lisztian title, *Après une Lecture de Dante*, having just heard a performance of that effective piece. (The title is really Victor Hugo's, but I did not know that then.) My verse-writing had a very short life. I knew quite well that I had no creative gift, but I believed that the writing of verse would make me a more appreciative reader. It certainly made me a very patient reader. No poet, ancient or modern, has ever had an auditor more willing than I to hear whether he has anything to say. My steady progress through the later volumes of Ward and Morley determined that I should not become a specialist. I made no intensive study of any one period, and I hold very strongly the belief that periods do not exist. Persons, yes; but not periods. Periods are fictions of the professors. What I wanted was to get a Pisgah-sight of the whole progress of English poetry and to discover what background of belief and feeling lay behind it all. A modest ambition! The vows of youth are rashly made and lightly broken. This is the story of a vow that was kept.

Time went on, my reading progressed, and I had some new experiences. One of the greatest was a performance of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in 1892. I had already fallen in love with *Lohengrin* and Jean de Reszke and had heard *Die Meistersinger*, then sung in Italian with a marvellous cast. But the *Ring*! I was carried away, not only by its mightiness, but by its sheer melodiousness, at a time when every one was saying that Wagner had no melody. In those days one was bound to catch the Wagnerian scarlet fever, sooner or later, and I was at the right age for it to take nicely and not dangerously. But

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the *Ring* was an enlarging experience in ways that I will not mention here, as they belong to a later period, the boundary of which is already in sight. You met me first as a child, next as a small boy eagerly devouring poetry, and next as a schoolboy absorbing mathematics mitigated by romance. I am now nineteen and within a few months of going to college. Soon I shall cease to be a boy and—Time is our tedious song should here have ending. The hour grows late. The quincunx of heaven runs low. The huntsmen are up in America and they are already past their first sleep in Persia. I have told my tale. And now, reader, I wonder how and when you made your first acquaintance with poets?

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§ ii

On Playing the Sedulous Ape

I

THE ingenious schoolboy can get almost any sum right if he knows the answer. Scholars of a larger growth display at times a similar skill in the art of retrovaticination. 'I can conceive (says Disraeli) nothing more idle or more useless than what is styled moral philosophy. We speculate upon the character of man....We cannot be wrong, because we have studied the past; and we are famous for discovering the future when it has taken place.' The secret of Robert Louis Stevenson's prose, much admired in its time, has been discovered in this infallible way by several critics. With the unanimity that is always wonderful they have found his writing unoriginal, unnatural and imitative, and they have even drawn a moral from its defects. The most comprehensive damnation comes, of course, from George Saintsbury, who was nothing if not emphatic: 'It is a commonplace now that only at the end of his too short life did he acquire—that he was even then but on the point of acquiring—a style perfectly natural, free and his own.' There are similar hostile verdicts which need not be repeated. How is it, we may ask, that critics, examining the prose of a varied and prolific writer, are able to say with confidence, and with frequency enough to make their views 'a commonplace', that it is unnatural, that it is unoriginal, that it is a mosaic, a pasticcio, that it is not his own, and so forth? Is it because the fact is so obvious, or because the acumen of the learned is so shrewd? It would be pleasing to believe the latter; but the probable explanation is to be found in that too familiar passage of *A College Magazine*, in which Stevenson confesses to having 'played the sedulous

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ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire, and to Obermann'. That is, the critics, having been told by the author that he imitated, have solemnly agreed that he is imitative. In other words, knowing the answer, they have worked the sum.

The conclusion is not convincing. Let us indulge, therefore, in a few reflections on the art of writing, and see if something cannot be said in defence of an ancient and honourable practice, the imitation of our betters. The point at issue, observe, is not whether the prose of Stevenson is good or bad, but whether its defects, such as they are, must be due to the attempts at imitation he professed to have made. What the critics really found was that his prose had a quality they disliked; what they believed they had found was the reason for their dislike. Their belief was wrong.

Consider the man. Robert Louis Stevenson in no way resembled the painful aspirant of a local Literary Society, and a course of prose practice would no more have the same effect upon each than a course of piano practice would have on Horowitz and Miss Higgins of Highgate. Stevenson was a man of genius, not a man of talent. Genius can turn all things to its own growth; talent can only reproduce. Set your talented aspirant to the imitation of Burton or Browne, and he will produce something like his originals and nothing like himself. Set Charles Lamb to the same endeavour, and he will give you *The Essays of Elia*. Stevenson had this gift of assimilation. Of course, if you are so minded, you can discover in him a few resemblances—after the fashion of William Knight, who, meeting this passage in Wordsworth,

> For who what is shall measure by what seems
> To be, or not to be,
> Or tax high Heaven with prodigality?

gravely adorned the Eversley edition with a reference to *Hamlet*; but this is rather a way of exposing yourself than of expounding an author. To read critically is to read by love as

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well as by logic. Logic is blind to the fine shades: it can see no difference where the inward eye can see no resemblance. The judgement that Stevenson's prose was imitative because he confessed to imitation is too simple to be true.

II

In the eighteen-eighties and nineties there was much talk about something called 'style' in prose. Stevenson discussed the matter in an early essay, *On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature*, in which he demonstrated the value of certain consonants and vowels in effective passages, a feat lately re-performed by Miss Edith Sitwell for the instruction of a generation that knows nothing of Stevenson, except that he was a Victorian writer of books for juveniles. Other essays make clear that Stevenson was intensely interested in the technique of his craft; but nowhere does it appear that he was trying to form 'a style', the confessions of *A College Magazine* being no more than the story of his attempts to learn how to write. The choice of words, and the arrangement of words in phrases, sentences and paragraphs—these are the tasks to which the intending writer must address himself and he may be lawfully instructed by examples of success and failure. Stevenson was a born writer of romance—of romantic melodrama—and he had always in mind as a warning the imperfect achievement of the great Sir Walter, who could conceive nobly and deliver himself meanly—sometimes as if he were lame and sometimes as if he were on stilts. (This is Stevenson's general opinion, to which it may properly be objected that Scott often wrote nobly.) In the romances that he felt a call to write, Stevenson determined to avoid both the lame and the stilted. Romance must neither flounder nor stumble, and it must be bravely habited. 'As I walked, my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words....Thus I lived with words.' Words! No doubt Stevenson here uses 'words' in a wide

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general sense; but in the narrow, particular sense his confession is important; for in the art of writing nothing is so important as words. Very few people use words; they use ready-made phrases, what are commonly called clichés, picked up from the papers, or from political rant, or from the jargon of business, or from the vanities of criticism. Defaced and featureless phrases are the current coin of most people's utterance. Words in their original brightness appear to frighten them. Is there not the unpleasing necessity of determining their just and accurate value? The phrase slips by unnoticed; the word is challenged and must ring true. And so Robert Louis Stevenson properly sought for 'the essential note and the right word', as the first firm step in his progress as a writer. The word 'style' appears only once in his confession, and is there cited as 'a happy distinction' in the writing of others.

The word 'style' itself must be challenged and made to deliver its precise value, for it has several meanings, two of which are important for our purpose. It may mean the literary idiosyncrasy—that which makes us recognize at once a typical passage of Shakespeare or Milton, of Carlyle or Meredith; but it may also mean a certain quality of perfection independent of idiosyncrasy—a quality that the personal Shakespeare and Milton generally have and that the personal Carlyle and Meredith sometimes have not. The troublesome fact is that these two meanings cut across each other confusingly. The style that means perfection is only in part coincident with the style that means personality. In extremes they are antagonistic. Excess of the idiosyncrasy that we often call style is incompatible with the pure perfection that we also call style. Even the professors confuse us, for here is Saintsbury, confident about the style of Stevenson, writing thus of Macaulay: 'His *Essays* and his *History* exhibit the most popular style which any English author has ever possessed. Competent critics object to its glaring defects, but have never denied its power.' In what sense is the word 'style' here used? How are we to under-

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stand that superlative, 'the most popular style which any English author has ever possessed'? The answer is not easy to find. Can 'glaring defects' keep house with 'style', in any sense? Let us, therefore, try to clear the confusion by citing actual examples; and as verse is more quotable than prose, we will call upon the poets for some lines—these, for instance:

> Here are sands, ignoble things,
> Dropt from the ruin'd sides of kings;

or these:

> And cast the kingdoms old
> Into another mould;

or these:

> Of calling shapes, and beck'ning shadows dire,
> And airy tongues, that syllable men's names
> On sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses:

or these:

> Light thickens, and the crow
> Makes wing to the rooky wood;
> Good things of day begin to droop and drowse.

or these:

> Breaking the silence of the seas
> Among the farthest Hebrides;

or this:

> The lone and level sands stretch far away;

or this:

> Ancestral voices prophesying war.

In these lines, various as they are, we have the perfect accomplishment—the touch above accomplishment—that we call style; and though, from memory, we know the sources, we cannot say that they have any marked idiosyncrasy that cries aloud the name of the author. That is, they have style in the greater, rarer sense, not style in the lesser, commoner sense. But when we turn to passages like this:

> By the ravenous teeth that have smitten
> Through the kisses that blossom and bud,
> By the lips intertwisted and bitten
> Till the foam has a savour of blood—

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or like this:

> He sleeps, the feverish poet—I suspect
> Not utterly companionless; but, friends,
> Wake up! The ghost's gone, and the story ends
> I'd fain hope, sweetly; seeing peri or ghoul,
> That spirits are conjectured fair or foul,
> Evil or good, judicious authors think,
> According as they vanish in a stink
> Or in a perfume. Friends, be frank! Ye snuff
> Civet, I warrant. Really? Like enough!
> Merely the savour's rareness; any nose
> May ravage with impunity a rose:
> Rifle a musk-pod and 'twill ache like yours.
> I'd tell you that same pungency ensures
> An after-gust, but that were overbold.

or like this:

> Master the blood, nor read by chills,
> Earth admonishes: Hast thou ploughed,
> Sown, reaped, harvested grain for the mills,
> Thou hast the light over shadow of cloud.
> Steadily eyeing, before that wail
> Animal-infant, thy mind began
> Momently nearer me: should sight fail,
> Plod in the track of the husbandman—

we know at once from the 'style' (as people say) who wrote them; but we know also that style, in the better sense, they have not. What they have is the excess of idiosyncrasy that is the negation of style. Style may be the man; but the greatest style is that which transcends the man.

It is hopeless now to demand any limitation of the word to one meaning, and, in fact, the limitation is unnecessary as long as we know which sense of the word we intend when we use it. We must be just as clear when we discuss the imitation of style, for there will be as many meanings of imitation as of style. The imitation of perfection is obviously different from the imitation of idiosyncrasy. The first is unquestionably legitimate. It is proper to consider deeply the methods by which a great writer has attained perfection—if we can find them—

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and to imitate them, when found. Perfection is universal, not personal. It is the property of all who can get it. The danger of imitation lies in the aping of mere idiosyncrasy, and, by the irony of things, the bad is always easier to imitate than the good. There were many performers who could imitate very passably the less agreeable oddities of Henry Irving's voice and gait; there was no one who could imitate his genius. An imitation, not offered with intention as a parody or as an exercise in technique, is a poor thing to bring to market when originals are cheap. A generation that does not read Obermann, that does not even read Matthew Arnold's poems on Obermann, is not likely to read an imitation of Obermann, by whomsoever made.

III

The ardent discussion of style during the last decades of the nineteenth century confirmed the uncritical admirers of Flaubert, Pater and Stevenson in a belief that style is something ornamental and super-imposed, like the plaster vases and floral festoons on old-fashioned wedding cakes—a belief which the writers named would have rejected with horror. Style, in the best sense, is part of the economy of utterance, not part of its extravagance. Style is the feather in the arrow, not the feather in the hat. It is not irrelevant or removable, for it is the result of a writer's endeavour to say something, not prettily, not fancifully, not grandly, but clearly, veraciously, decisively. Neither in art nor in dress does style imply adornment. A coster, proud of his bedizened bride's turn-out, once boasted that you couldn't get another half-crown's worth on her anywhere. That excess is what seems to pass with some people for style. It is not style; it is something horribly unlike style; it is stylish, or even worse. Literature is the art of saying something; but while the reporter will think only of the 'something' and the literary dandy only of the 'saying', the genuine artist conceives the 'something' as 'something said'. In his mind the

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'something' and the 'saying' are not two things, but one. 'If you will endeavour [says Bagehot] to write an imitation of the thoughts of Swift in a copy of the style of Addison, you will find that not only is it hard to write Addison's style, from its intrinsic excellence, but also that the more you approach to it, the more you lose the thought of Swift.' People sometimes write as if they thought the mind produced a set of abstract ideas, to which the artist carefully added words or colours or tones. Nothing of the kind takes place—except, perhaps, in that form of pictorial art beloved by the sentimental public, namely, the painted anecdote or moral, the really important fact being, not the picture, but the legend on the frame. Paint, however badly, the head of a young girl gazing ecstatically upwards, and the worthless painting at once becomes almost sacred, if you call it 'The Soul's Awakening'. Paint, in an utterly commonplace fashion, an elderly man seated at a desk, and a young man beside him, with clasped hands and solemn gaze, and you have achieved nothing at all; but when you call it 'The Doctor', the public heart is touched by a sense of tragedy. Ah, that, they say, is Art! Every picture tells a story, as it should! But the answer is that these pictures tell no story whatever. The story is told by the labels. The pictures themselves have said nothing; they are mute explanations of the labels. Literature can resort to no such deceptions. Blake's illustrations to the Book of Job are separable adornments; the Book of Job exists without them. Literature is its own illustration. The problem for the artist in literature is to get 'the something as something said' down upon paper so that others may share his vision.

> Since then at an uncertain hour,
> Now oftimes and now fewer,
> That anguish comes and makes me tell
> My ghastly aventure.

Such was Coleridge's first attempt at a famous stanza. But it would not do. 'Now oftimes and now fewer' is a line without

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style. 'That anguish comes and makes me tell' is perhaps even worse. The 'something said' was but a feeble representation of what the poet wished to say; so he made another attempt, and was satisfied, for he never touched it again:

> Since then, at an uncertain hour,
> That agony returns:
> And till my ghastly tale is told
> This heart within me burns.

The second is not more adorned than the first, nor does it convey more information; but, like the well-feathered shaft, it strikes into the gold, when the other falters and fails.

IV

Style in any art is a kind of tension arising from the conjunction of the greatest discernible effect with the least discernible effort. Therefore, when prose has true style we get a sense of something definitely and memorably said, not of something marred in the saying. To illustrate this let us turn, not to any purple patches, but to the current prose of correspondence. Thus writes Gay to Swift:

> I find you are determined not to write to me according to our old stipulation. Had I not been every post for some time in expectation to have heard from you, I should have writ to you before to have let you know the present state of your affairs, for I would not have you think me capable of neglecting yours, whatever you may think of me as to my own.

There is no need to quote more. Prose of this sort is simply unreadable save as task work. The writer says nothing clearly; he gives us a smear of words, choosing one haphazard way of saying what might be put in a dozen other ways, most of them better. Set against it any passage from Swift himself; this, for instance, from a letter to Bolingbroke:

> Pray, my Lord, how are the gardens? Have you taken down the mount, and removed the yew hedges? Have you not bad weather for the spring corn? Has Mr Pope gone farther in his ethic poems?

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And is the headland sown with wheat? And what says Polybius? And how does my Lord St John, which last question is very material to me, because I love Burgundy, and riding between Twickenham and Dawley. I built a wall five years ago, and when the masons played the knaves, nothing delighted me so much as to stand by while my servants threw down what was amiss. I have likewise seen a monkey overthrow all the dishes and plates in a kitchen, merely for the pleasure of seeing them tumble, and hearing the clatter they made in their fall. I wish you would invite me to such another entertainment; but you think, as I ought to think, that it is time for me to have done with the world, and so I would if I could get into a better before I was called into the best, and not die here in a rage, like a poisoned rat in a hole.

That is very different. Swift does not blunder into haphazard utterance: he chooses, not a way, but the way of speech, and what he says could not be put differently without loss. In other words, Swift is a master of prose style, to whom we may profitably put ourselves to school.

Against the claim that style arises from the tension between means and end, between effort and effect, it may be contended that some of our fantastic writers and some of our eloquent writers are extravagant rather than economical. What about Lamb, for instance, whose peculiar excellence appears to arise from excess rather than from economy? Style, in the finer sense, is always precarious where a personal manner is pronounced; but we need have no doubt about Lamb. The purpose of any utterance is a most important element of its form—a fact that critics of Stevenson appear to have forgotten. If you have Euclid's matter to deliver, there is no better style than Euclid's; but you would not take a theorem of Euclid as the model for an essay on Walking Tours. Lamb did not write to propagate useful knowledge about chimney-sweeps or the Society of Friends. These things were his excuse, not his thesis. He sought to convey, not objective fact, but his own personal way of viewing fact. He was a composer of fantasias; his genius led him towards a natural extravagance of effect, and his art took the most economical means of securing it. In

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his more serious moments he is as grave as the gravest. The prose of Milton and Sir Thomas Browne is conditioned by their purpose. Milton was the public orator of England. His purpose was not to inform, but to convince, not to convey facts, but to arouse passionate feelings, and his eloquence, in certain passages, cannot be matched in English prose. No other writer has dared to attempt his loftiest flights. Sir Thomas Browne was as private as Milton was public. He was a careful man of science, not without the credulities that his science had inherited from tradition; but he had the imaginative fervour of a poet. In man there was something that forever eluded the scalpel of the anatomist; and in the macrocosm of the universe no optic glass could reveal the source of governance displayed in events, inevitable and fore-ordained. Upon this mystery he brooded deeply, and in short tracts, written for himself or for a friend, he strove to expound his reverent sense of wonder. Even such trivial matters as the discovery of some cinerary urns or the quincuncial arrangement of trees could move him to profound and majestic eloquence. But in Browne, as in Milton, the style is organic, structural. Nothing could be altered, nothing could be removed. There is no superfluous ornament, nothing that is not an expression of the animating spirit. Both paid the price of an opulently latinized vocabulary by lapses into singularity and crabbedness inimical to style; but both are entitled to be judged by their successes. From affectation both are entirely free. Style may be a property of every kind of prose, from the plainest to the richest. To find a falsely aureate prose exhibiting extravagance without economy, and therefore without style, we can turn to Guevara's *Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius* in the version of Lord Berners.

V

Stevenson nowhere suggests that he laboured to cultivate an affected dandyism or to imitate an enticing manner. What he tells us quite plainly in that much quoted essay is that he took

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great pains with his writing in the days of youth, when it is so hard to be simple, so unnatural to be natural. He felt drawn by instinct to writing, but found by experience that 'true ease in writing comes by art, not chance', so with his note-book and pencil he set eagerly to work, describing or inventing, having always in his mind some happy example of success in word or phrase or cadence to set the pace for his own first stumbling progress. His models were the standards by which he could judge his progress. Surely there is no better way of learning to write well—or, indeed, to ride well, or to paint well, or to bat well, than getting what we can out of the experience of a master and adapting his success to our own native activity. In youth we may have tried hard to bat like Ranji. We knew we should never be able to bat like Ranji; but it was better to take Ranji as our standard than Bobby Abel, for Ranji had style and Bobby Abel had not. Stevenson, remember, was of those who wanted not merely to write, but to write well. He was attracted by instinct, not to the artizans of letters, but to the artists, to those

> Who showed, in utterance of each inward thought,
> Not how the phrase might stand, but how it ought.

That skill of happy phrase and just word is what he coveted and laboured to obtain. But his confession of effort, not wisely made, has been taken amiss. Perhaps we are children still in matters of art. We are enchanted by the feat, but dislike being told how it is done. Samuel Butler, for instance, writes characteristically as if he felt a personal grievance about it, and he should be quoted to show how completely he contradicts himself and refutes his own arguments. Butler had some affinity with Balaam: he often left a blessing when he had set out to curse. Here is one of the Note-Book entries:

> I never knew a writer yet who took the smallest pains with his style and was at the same time readable. Plato's having had seventy shies at one sentence is quite enough to explain to me why I dislike him. A man may, and ought to take a deal of pains to write clearly, tersely,

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and euphemistically: he will write many a sentence three or four times over—to do much more than this is worse than not re-writing at all: he will be at great pains to see that he does not repeat himself, to arrange his matter in the way that shall best enable the reader to master it, to cut out superfluous words, and, even more, to eschew irrelevant matter: but in each case he will be thinking not of his own style but of his reader's convenience.

Men like Newman and R. L. Stevenson seem to have taken pains to acquire what they called a style as a preliminary measure—as something that they had to form before their writings could be of any value. I should like to put it on record that I never took the smallest pains with my style, have never thought about it, and do not know or want to know whether it is a style at all, or whether it is not, as I believe and hope, just common, simple straightforwardness. I cannot conceive how any man can take thought for his style without loss to himself and his readers.

And then he goes on to describe his efforts to eliminate certain faults of character—not because he cared about character, but because their removal made life easier; and he concludes with the significant admission, 'But I suppose that is really attending to style, after all'. So Balaam, intending to curse, delivers his blessing.

No one can fail to notice the most disabling weakness of Butler's argument, his use of the word 'style' in a sense not meant by those he condemns: neither Stevenson nor Newman 'took pains to acquire what they called a style' in Butler's sense. Newman's most exact confession of painstaking is contained in a letter of 1869, that is, when he was sixty-eight. Does anyone try 'to acquire a style as a preliminary measure' at the age of sixty-eight? Preliminary to what? But perhaps the most decisive way of treating Butler's declaration is not to discuss it, but to transpose it into other terms, as thus: 'I have a great dislike for cleanness, and I feel sure that any one who troubles about cleanness is a most suspicious character. For my own part, I take a bath every morning and evening, I wash my hands and face every few hours, and I attend regularly to my nails and ears and teeth; but I don't care a bit about

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cleanness, and I don't mind whether I am clean or not.' Butler writes as if it were legitimate for an artist to adopt means, and illegitimate for him to have an end; but the man who cares about the end, cleanness, and the man who cares about the means, washing, are both, so to speak, in the same bath; and the man who cares about the end, perfection, and the man who cares about the means, labour, are both in quest of style. Really, Butler writes as if he thought that style meant no more than using a scented soap. And he professed to admire Handel! Fortunately his practice was better than his theory, and he can be numbered with those who have written plain prose excellently. He asked no more of his work than 'just common, simple straightforwardness'. No more? The only fitting comment is a remark of his own in another connection: 'Common straightforwardness and kindliness are the highest points that man or woman can reach.'

VI

The value of prose or verse bears no relation whatever to the ease or difficulty of production. Some men write easily and some do not; nay, the same man will write fluently or laboriously without known cause of difference. In the mind of the artist there is laid up, as a sort of Platonic ideal, the 'something' as 'something said'; and his trouble is to get that 'something said' from his mind to his paper without loss of sense and quality. As Stevenson himself remarks in another essay; 'On the approach to execution all is changed. The artist must now step down, don his working clothes and become the artizan.' For some this transformation is not always easy. Newman tells us, in various passages of private correspondence, what trouble he had to get his meaning fully and becomingly expressed, and how he corrected, re-corrected, cancelled and wrote anew. Why? 'To express clearly and exactly my meaning; this has been the motive principle of all my corrections and re-writings.' He adds, too, that his only pattern

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in style was Cicero, whose 'great mastery of Latin is shown especially in his clearness'. Here, then, we have not only a confession of labour, but an explanation of its motive. A reader who knew no more of Newman than a report of his struggles might conclude that all this writing and patching must have been done for the sake of certain splendours, that prose thus produced would be mannered, stilted and bedizened, and the writer a very Osric of his kind. Yet, as any one may see for himself, there is no more supple, more lucid, or less decorated prose than Newman's, at its best, the labour upon which was no more than the cost of clearness. And let us call up yet another prophet, 'an old man covered with a mantle'. There was a time when Tolstoy was commonly regarded as a preacher, mindful of his message, and aiming no higher than the edification of peasants. Of Tolstoy as a creative artist this is not the place to speak. Let us take him as a preacher, and behold him labouring, not upon what he had to deliver, but how to deliver it, and that in such a book as *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, easily dismissed as something lying outside the range of art. Nothing written lies outside the range of art. Art is in the very substance of prose, not in its subject. Listen to Tolstoy the preacher:

> I never was so occupied as now. I am still at work on the 8th Chapter. I sit at it for five hours at a time, and spend my whole soul on it, so that nothing remains over....I think I have finished, but I only think so. Do not blame me for it, dear friend! You know how important to us are things that seem unimportant to a spectator or reader. The reader has only to answer to himself; but I must so prepare things that they may be suitable for, and (if I have faith in myself) may act on millions of different individuals.

And later:

> I am still writing the same thing. And hard as it is, I can't tear myself away from it....I always want to say the thing more clearly and simply.

The corroboration of Stevenson by Newman is specially noteworthy. In each there is anxiety to get something said in

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the best possible way, and rueful confession of frequent defeat —'some persons write their best first, and I very seldom do', says Newman; 'things that to a happier constitution had perhaps come by nature', says Stevenson of his efforts to catch 'the essential note and the right word'. Newman's purpose was to persuade, and his concern, therefore, was to get not merely his meaning, but every shade of his meaning down on the paper in a form that would be unquestionable. Tolstoy concurs. Stevenson, dealing with matter more delicate, must wing his slender thought with the essential note and the right word, or it would falter and miscarry. In each, too, we have the confessed and conscious adoption of models; and here the state of Newman is clearly the worse. If imitation is perilous and damnable, then grievous indeed will be the fate of the man who chooses one model rather than many, for his iniquity is the more likely to be accomplished. A man in seeking to copy many might conceivably find himself; but, by all critical hypothesis, fastening himself upon one, he becomes a mere echo and shadow.

Newman, like Tolstoy, expressly names the motive of his labour—the avoidance of difficulty and obscurity, the acquisition of all possible clearness. Stevenson, more elaborately, says that he toiled after his models in the hope of attaining to their propriety, force and distinction of expression. Now it should be obvious that these qualities are imitable without the least danger to individuality. A clerk can imitate the legibility of another man's script without imitating his handwriting; a speaker can imitate the clearness of another man's utterance without imitating his voice; and the grubby boy can imitate the cleanness of the model boy's face without imitating his features. Clearness in prose is a lawfully imitable quality; and so a man proposing to write philosophy could profitably study Berkeley as a lesson in lucidity and the translator of Croce as a warning against obscurity, and lose not a single inflexion of his idiom.

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VII

'Only at the end of his too short life did Stevenson acquire—he was even then but on the point of acquiring—a style perfectly natural, free, and his own.' Thus Saintsbury. Stevenson was just forty-four when he died. Surely a man who had published many volumes of unusual variety and had practised the art of writing from boyhood should have found himself at forty-four. And how can any critic, however acute, know anything about the style that untimely death prevented Stevenson from acquiring? No valid conclusions can be drawn from the fragmentary *Weir of Hermiston*, the prose of which is unusually sober because the theme is grimly tragical. Never before had Stevenson attempted a story of such severe and unromantic tenor, and the prose is therefore unlike that of his other tales—quite unlike that of its contemporary *St Ives*, which, like *Weir*, was dictated, and never worked over: in fact he proposed to abandon both tales and begin another. We do not know whether he could have kept that sober manner up. It is unusually restrained for a writer who was generally exuberant and even excessive. In *Weir of Hermiston* the style is appropriate to its matter. Is not that enough? To talk about 'a style perfectly natural' is to beg many questions. Is not the prose of *Travels with a Donkey* perfectly natural for its purpose? Is not the style of such stories as *Markheim*, *Will o' the Mill*, *The Sire de Malétroit's Door*, *The Beach of Falesá* and *A Lodging for the Night*, a style natural and varied for the various themes? How much of *The Wrong Box* is Stevenson and how much Lloyd Osbourne we do not know; but we may safely assume that the prose was carefully worked over by Stevenson, and we can hardly deny that, for its extravagant purpose, the style is perfectly natural. To call Stevenson's prose 'not natural' is to lapse into one of those meaningless abstractions that are the ruin of critical

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discussion. For what do we mean by 'natural' and 'his own'? Something can be called his because it is not mine. A natural style is a style natural to the writer, however unnatural to the critic. Lamb's elaborate style may be unnatural to a précis-clerk; but it was natural to Lamb. The unnatural style to Lamb was what he wrote in the ledgers of Leadenhall Street. 'Maps of Mexico, dim as dreams—and soundings of the Bay of Panama.' No; that would certainly not do for a White Paper; but it does very well in *The South-Sea House*. And Lamb, too, we are told, was an imitator; he wrote *The Essays of Elia* because he admired the seventeenth century. It is sounder criticism to say that he admired the seventeenth century because he wrote *The Essays of Elia*. This certainly can be admitted of Stevenson, that his style was not natural because it was not usual. But then Stevenson himself was an unusual person, with his velvet coat and his exorbitant locks. He was excessive; he showed off; he wrote too much about himself and his literary exertions. What appears odd is that his earliest writings have the same manner as the latest—odd, because if he had successfully played the sedulous ape to many authors, there must have been evidence of imitation in his first essays. The contributions to the *Edinburgh University Magazine* during 1871 exhibit no trace of the discipline he claimed to have undergone; what they do exhibit is a young writer with little to say and a forced manner of saying it. In his first volume of essays, *Virginibus Puerisque*, published ten years later, we observe the author writing with greater ease and often with less manner. Let us appose two quotations:

> The heroes themselves say, as often as not, that fame is their object; but I do not think that is much to the purpose. People generally say what they have been taught to say; that was the catchword they were given in youth to express the aims of their way of life; and men who are engaged in gaining great battles are not likely to take much trouble in reviewing their sentiments and the words in which they were told to express them.

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That is the first. Here is the second:

I am now trying an experiment, very frequent among modern authors, which is to write upon nothing; when the subject is utterly exhausted, to let the pen still move on; by some called the ghost of wit, delighting to walk after the death of its body. And to say the truth, there seems to be no part of knowledge in fewer hands, than that of discerning when to have done.

In general manner there is little difference between these two passages. Both are examples of the plain way of writing. It is not impossible to imagine that the author of the first might have written the second. Yet they come from vastly different sources; for one is from *Virginibus Puerisque* and the other from *A Tale of a Tub*. 'Only at the end of his too short life did Stevenson acquire—he was even then but on the point of acquiring—a style perfectly natural, free, and his own.' Is that clearly proved by these quotations? What he wrote at the end of his too short life was this kind of thing:

What a monstrous spectre is this man, the disease of the agglutinated dust, lifting alternate feet or lying drugged with slumber; killing, feeding, growing, bringing forth small copies of himself; grown upon with hair like grass, fitted with eyes that move and glitter in his face; a thing to set children screaming; and yet looked at nearlier, known as his fellows know him, how surprising are his attributes!

If we are to play the sedulous ape, let it not be to prose like this, even if this is the style he was 'then but on the point of acquiring, a style perfectly natural, free and his own!' Set beside that passage the first two paragraphs of the sermon by Newman called *The Second Spring* and the false note in Stevenson will instantly be heard.

And here, from the same period, is a passage in lighter vein:

With Sir Charles Grandison I am unacquainted. There are many impediments in this brief life of man; I have more than once, indeed, reconnoitered the first volume with a flying party, but always decided not to break ground before the place till my siege guns came up; and it is an odd thing—I have been all these years in the field and that powerful artillery is still miles in the rear. The day it overtakes me,

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Baron Gibbon's fortress shall be beat about his ears, and my flag be planted on the formidable ramparts of the second part of *Faust*. Clarendon, too—But why should I continue this confession? Let the reader take up the wondrous tale himself, and run over the books he has tried and failed withal, and vowed to try again, and now beholds, as he goes about a library, with secret compunction.

And so he goes on, with 'spies', 'Intelligence Department', etc. Is not this a falsely animated way of confessing that one has not read certain books? Does it not imply a kind of merit in abstention? In any case, as this military fantasia occupies no small room in a brief essay called *Some Gentleman In Fiction* it is a mere excrescence. It is not organic, structural. In the passages just quoted do we not hear one voice, the voice of Stevenson himself? Certainly to none of his alleged models, certainly not to 'Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire, to Obermann', can we attribute that theatrical gloom, that theatrical gaiety—for it is studiously theatrical, as a part that is played. And of all the parts that Stevenson played the most hollow was that of the moralist. Already in *Virginibus Puerisque* the hortatory strain is heard, and it grows more persistent till it becomes the dominant note of many essays. Sermonizing is much easier than moralizing. Anyone with a gift of fluency can make sermons; to moralize demands a gift beyond fluency. It demands a fundamental integrity of spirit which there is no evidence that Stevenson possessed. And so, of all his writings the moral essays are the least satisfying. They are wanting in the sincerity for which no facility can atone. That deficiency, and not some trick of manner, is the gravest charge that can be made against him.

This theatrical showiness is so plainly the fault of his confession in *A College Magazine* that critics must have lost their sense of humour in taking his tale seriously. Literary confession is not made on oath, and many autobiographies have been known to dwell heavily upon what looks well in print.

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Did Stevenson really expend much time and effort on playing the sedulous ape to all those models? The first two pages of the essay, with their description of juvenile compositions that were now in the manner of Webster and now in the manner of Congreve, now in the manner of *Sordello* and now in the manner of Chaucer, now in the manner of Hazlitt and now in the manner of Ruskin, are quite obviously exaggerations meant to make an impressive display. See what a clever boy was I! We may be sure that Stevenson began to write early, that he took great pains with his work, and that he recognized, in certain authors, a quality to which he had not attained and to which he must seek to attain. There is nothing uncommon or reprehensible in this. But so seriously do people take the confessions in *A College Magazine* that, if they are tutors of becoming gravity, they warn their students against the danger to individuality incurred by such practices, and crown their discourse by citing Stevenson as an example of defeated originality. Their alarm is groundless. We are in no danger of seeing armies of Stevensons issuing from the portals of our educational establishments. And perhaps it is permissible to ask, if professors really think that imitation can create a Stevenson, why we are afflicted by the prose of professors. In most of us the enjoyment of art is passive, in a few active. The person whose appreciation of the beauties and subtleties of various prose is so keen that he must try to reproduce them will be one born with such an impulse towards writing that no imitation can harm him. On the other hand, imitation will hardly injure the personality of those who have no personality to be injured.

VIII

Let us now leave Stevenson, with whom we are not really concerned, though we have taken him as a text, and turn to those who write from a compulsion that has no relation to art. It is an enormous, untrained and untaught army, which, with

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the increase of controls, i.e. of semi-literate officials, will be required to write more and more. Few people are free from the compulsion of writing. Prose is not only an instrument of art, it is a requirement of living, and we have to use it in speech as well as in writing. We ought clearly to recognize the fact that there are two different kinds of prose, the prose that is a statement and the prose that is a creation; and the importance lies here, that one can be taught and the other cannot. Sometimes the prose that is statement suddenly takes wings and flies into the region of creative art; but its normal dwelling-place is the solid, uninspiring ground. The born writers, the creative artists in prose, we can leave to themselves—they will find their way, Stevenson's way or another. The rest, the inarticulate, cannot find their way: they do not know how to begin, how to go on, how to stop. And the shocking, unchallengeable truth is that they have never been taught how to write. They have all been to school, but they have never been taught to write. They have, of course, wasted many, many hours in writing something called composition or an essay, and the teachers have, of course, wasted many, many hours in writing elaborate corrections in red ink or blue pencil. But in these performances there is neither teaching nor learning. A composition, or an essay, or whatever it may be called, is an approach to creative literature, and so can neither be taught nor learned. A creative writer is born with a certain gift which he can develop in various ways; but it is quite certain that no teacher, however skilful, can endow a pupil with a gift he does not possess by nature. And yet all the school efforts are fatally diverted to teaching the unteachable. Do the teachers who impose these semi-creative efforts upon pupils themselves possess the creative gift? They do not; their form of self-expression is exhibited in red ink and blue pencil, although everybody knows that it is quite impossible to correct a bad composition; only really good compositions can be corrected. The time wasted in unprofitable writing and useless correction

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should have been devoted, as it never is, to the teaching of simple, exact, work-a-day English. The victims of our composition-essay system leave their schools and find themselves unable to write a letter, a report, a memorandum, unable to give definite instructions or clear explanations. How many of our vast army of officials know how to draw up a simple form requiring precise answers to precise questions? What pupils need to be taught is the use of English as an instrument of precision. Such a discipline would give invaluable training both to the inarticulate and to the few endowed with a natural gift of expression. This training should most certainly not be directed towards imaginative or creative writing, but should be a proper part of instruction in any subject requiring written statements of facts or answers to questions. Those who teach history, geography or science must teach, not some abstractions called history, geography, or science, but knowledge that can be clearly expressed in written or spoken answers to questions. The teachers of science who require a clear record of the stages in an experiment must themselves teach pupils how to make such a record, and must regard the experiment as a failure if a clear record is not made. No teacher can shuffle off this responsibility for teaching English as an instrument of precision in his own subject upon some other person whose special subject is English. The English specialist has work of his own to do; it is not part of his work to provide the English needed for history, geography and science, though the more thoroughly his work is done, the more will pupils be helped in the English required for other subjects. It is at the school age that the teaching of English as an instrument of precision must begin. Those past the school age, who become aware that they do not know how to write, and seek help from the rather pathetic manuals one meets on the bookstalls—*How to Write Good English, Is this Correct English? Can you Express Yourself Clearly?* and so on—are usually past help, past cure; the bad habits acquired during a long course of school compositions and essays have become

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so deeply ingrained that the well-meant advice of the manuals is rather like an attempt to cure a deformity by applications of liniment.

IX

In 1941 there appeared a volume called *The Marking of English Essays*. The sub-title describes it as 'A Report on an Investigation carried out by a Sub-Committee of the International Institute Examinations Enquiry Committee'. Many of its one hundred and sixty-five pages are occupied by an elaborate Statistical Report intelligible only to trained statisticians; but the others contain matter of great importance to those who are interested in the writing of English. The investigators began by scoring a failure, which they admit in a sentence that seems to be one of the most important in the book:

> The results of the investigation suggested, first, that the attainments in English of most school-children of from twelve and a half to thirteen and a half were too elementary to be tested satisfactorily by an 'essay' test, and, secondly, that in order to yield useful results an investigation of this kind should be made on pupils of a homogeneous group educated in schools of the same kind.
>
> This led to the decision that the next investigation should be made on the work of girls and boys who were preparing for a School Certificate Examination and intended to take that Examination within a year of the date of the essay tests.

(Eight School Certificate Examinations were at that date approved by the Board of Education as First School Examinations.)

If we remember that the purpose of the Sub-Committee was to inquire into the marking of essays, and not into the writing or the teaching of essays, we shall all agree that they were right in choosing as their victims 'pupils of a homogeneous group educated in schools of the same kind'. The more alike the essays were the more easy was it to judge how variously they were marked. But observe the admission made at the beginning, 'that the attainments in English of most school-children of

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from twelve and a half to thirteen and a half were too elementary to be tested satisfactorily by an "essay" test'. Surely no elaborate investigation was needed to prove that ordinary pupils of twelve and a half to thirteen and a half cannot write essays. Indeed, a task of this kind should never have been imposed upon them. The specific assertion that 'the attainments in English of most school-children of from twelve and a half to thirteen and a half were too elementary' is a gentle euphemism. What is obviously meant is that they had no attainments: in other words, they could not write. Now that is a matter that really needs investigation. If these children of thirteen and a half who could not write came from the elementary or primary schools, they were within a few months of the leaving age and were going out into the world almost illiterate. If children of from twelve and a half to thirteen and a half have not learned how to write plain, simple, correct English, when are they going to begin, and who is to teach them? What have they been doing in a long school life which began at five? Are seven or eight years too few for the task of teaching plain, simple, correct English? Is the English language unteachable? We are forced back to the bald accusation already made, that in most schools the pupils are not taught how to write plain, simple, correct English. They do not learn how to use English as an instrument of precision. In all schools taking young pupils English is the only subject that really matters. Natural activities, such as drawing and singing, which need little formal teaching, are here purposely disregarded: most children draw better and sing better than most instructed adults. If a pupil of any school of any grade has learned by fourteen, as he should certainly have learned, how to speak, write and read plain, simple, correct English, he has acquired the means of learning everything else; if he has not, he is maimed for life. All the compositions, essays and fanciful exercises have been not only useless, but positively harmful, if he has not learned the fundamentals of English usage.

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X

The more closely one reads the Report the more gloomy one feels about the teaching of English. The examiners and the Sub-Committee decided that each essay should be marked for the following categories: (i) Sense; (ii) Spelling; (iii) Punctuation, including Formal Paragraphing; (iv) Grammar; (v) Vocabulary; (vi) Sentence Structure; and (vii) General Impression; and that the mark for General Impression should be allotted after the other categories had been marked. (The names of the categories were afterwards modified and made more precise.) That seems to ensure uniformity of marking. But what happened? Different examiners gave the same essay widely different marks in each of the categories, and at last one examiner gave the same essay a totally different assessment when it was presented to him (or her) a second time, after a long interval. The clearest conclusion to be drawn from the investigation is one that finds no place in the Report, namely, that all concerned were trying to mark the unmarkable. The Statistical Report proves that conclusively. This is not to be an essay on essays; but every reader knows, without being told, that the numerous values which combine to make an essay delightful are elusive and cannot be assessed by any 'median mark of scale to denote competency'. There is no need to discuss this assertion. The reader can make his own test. Let him try to mark, for the given categories, Lamb's essay *Old China*—certainly one of the most personal, most charming and most serious. What mark will you assign it for Sense? It is called *Old China*, but, save for some introductory sentences (which you will penalize for facetiousness) and one brief remark at the close, it has nothing to do with old china. Spelling? Well, the printer has seen to that. Punctuation, including Formal Paragraphing: Two consecutive paragraphs contain less than two lines; one paragraph contains a bare line and a half. Another contains twenty-six lines, others are of

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almost that length. The final paragraph contains nearly thirty-seven lines. Formal paragraphing is therefore Bad. In punctuation, the stop most frequently employed is the long dash—there are thirteen in one paragraph alone. Punctuation is therefore Bad. Grammar: in general correct, but so involved as to leave the reader uncertain of syntactical relations; some of the paragraphs would defy formal analysis. A high mark, therefore, cannot be given. Vocabulary: generally good, but sometimes over-elaborate, e.g. the use of 'optics' for 'eyes'. Nevertheless a good mark could be given for the attempt to use a variety of words. Sentence Structure: see Grammar, Formal Paragraphing and Punctuation. General Impression: A jumble of unrelated ideas—china, poverty, clothes, book-buying, print-buying, reminiscences of the theatre, walks, food, youth, age, etc. There is not the least evidence of a Plan, with duly correlated members; and the titular subject is never discussed. Well, that is how *Old China* is likely to fare in a First School Certificate Examination. The kind of essay that finds most favour with the examiners is the facile stream of commonplace, without positive character, and without obvious grammatical blunders—the kind of feat in which girls excel. Girls are more monkey-minded than boys. They imitate their mistresses, adopt the cant of the class-room, and pour it out gushingly. The most interesting essayist is the worst, a boy numbered 43. All the eight examiners regarded his first essay as illiterate; seven out of the eight examiners regarded his second essay as illiterate; six out of the eight examiners regarded his third essay as illiterate; five out of the eight examiners regarded his fourth essay as illiterate. The Report says: 'It is quite clear that No. 43, though the most illiterate of our candidates, has quite a respectable power of saying what he wants to say without any kind of ambiguity.' It is also quite clear that a boy who 'has quite a respectable power of saying what he wants to say without any kind of ambiguity' is not illiterate, and that the examiners who call him so are incom-

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petent. He knows next to nothing about punctuation, probably because he has never been taught. He spells very badly for a boy of his age, even writing 'one' where he means 'won', though he uses 'won' correctly in the very next line; but there is no correlation between spelling and literacy, unless we mean literacy in a strictly limited sense; and to estimate that kind of literacy we should use a spelling-test, not an essay-test. What 43 most clearly lacks is facility. He is struggling to say what he thinks is the truth, but he has not yet learned how to say it with ease. Some of his utterances are dead against the cant of the class-room and the school, and would therefore be unpopular with teachers and examiners alike. His quality can be illustrated by the last sentence of his last essay, in which he is asked to describe to a French boy the characteristics of the English people (what a subject!): 'They are allround sportsmen but they are never contented because when you become perfectly contented you and a clam are first cosins.' The last remark is plainly not original. It is a wisecrack he has picked up from an American film or an American magazine. But the point is that he has picked it up. It has struck his ear as something memorably said, and so he clings to it, and then works it into an essay. Illiterate? Certainly not: he has a dawning sense of style. Such a boy could be taught how to write good English without any harm to his originality; but what he needs is a course of exercises in paragraphing and punctuation, not a course of essay-writing. Indeed his attempts at the essay, as quoted in the Report, indicate that he has never been taught how to write, but has been left to flounder unaided, though, of course, we may suppose that quantities of useless red ink or blue pencil corrections were lavished on his poor sincere pages. The Report, both literary and statistical, clearly proves that examiners do not know how to mark essays, and further, that essays ought not to be set as a compulsory part of a First School Examination.

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XI

It may be objected that a severe discipline in the writing of English designed to make that language an instrument of precision banishes from the pupil's mind any hope of writing for pleasure. The objection is ill-founded; for those who find pleasure in writing will always write, and will certainly find pleasure in discipline. The born pianist or violinist is one who takes most kindly to technical exercises; the unapt player resents them as drudgery. Any pupil who shows a desire and talent for writing should be encouraged; but he should not be bound to write essays of examination-length. The notion that all pupils can achieve a complete act of self-expression in words in the space of one hour is so plainly absurd that only examiners and the teachers they dominate can entertain it. Length may perhaps be prescribed, but not time. Every person with any experience of writing for periodicals as an outside contributor knows quite well that a fixed space must be filled and not exceeded; but he would resent having to complete his article in something less than an hour. (An inside member of the staff may often have to write against time.) The editor who demands six hundred words never demands sixty minutes as well. But that is just what examiners and teachers do. Is it educationally desirable that every pupil in a class should be writing on the same subject at the same time? If pupils have a desire and talent for writing, let them choose their own subject, take their own time, and write as much as they please —in school or at home. Not all the subjects need be imaginative. A mechanically-minded boy might conceivably wish to write at length about the internal combustion engine or about jet-propulsion, and would properly and profitably consult works of reference. That would be real writing, not the sham writing of the composition period and the examination room. On the other hand, there are short, necessary exercises, such as the writing of formal letters, which should be done collectively.

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A formal letter must follow a certain ritual, and that ritual must be taught—including the important detail of 'lay-out'. But here, too, the exercise should deal with realities—the letters being such as might actually be written. There can be little doubt that one main cause of the inability of English children to write simply, plainly and correctly is that they have been compelled to produce shams instead of realities. They do not learn to use English as an instrument of precision because they have never been taught, or even expected, to be precise. A premium is put upon diffuseness. Their essay-writing, however disguised, is humbug, and they know it is humbug. From the regular practice of humbug nothing but harm can ensue.

XII

A distinction has been drawn between the prose that is a statement and the prose that is a creation. What is common to both kinds of prose is the medium, words, and these every kind of writer, from the most poetic to the most prosaic, must learn how to use. Words in themselves are difficult, and when combined into a statement may betray the writer. Words have a fundamental meaning, but they also have overtones, or what musicians technically call 'partials'. Words cannot be compared exactly with notes in music, for their 'overtones' are metaphorical, not literal; but some words tend to gather associations which are difficult to forget when we try to use a particular word precisely. For instance, the word 'mumps' has almost no secondary meanings; but the word 'atonement' sets up a whole series of associations, and the writer can never be quite sure that the reader will take just the writer's meaning, no more and no less. It is most important, therefore, to ascertain the exact, original meaning of a word. Never use a word at second-hand. Make sure that you know its meaning. Perhaps the most misused word in the English language is 'literally'. English has an extraordinarily rich vocabulary and almost no

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mechanism. It tends to break out into barely recognized metaphors which, if pursued too accurately, become tiresome, and which, if used inexactly, become ridiculous. The word 'literally' is a kind of danger signal. It warns the reader that he must take the word or words that follow at their actual and literal value, and not in any metaphorical sense. Yet countless people use that invaluable word of warning as if it were an adverb of emphasis, and say 'I was literally burning with indignation', a sentence which means that indignation had caused the speaker to burst into flames. The most glaring misuse of this word was made by a prominent clergyman during the war of 1914–18, when he declared in a speech or sermon that to him the words of Mr Lloyd George were 'literally vox Dei'. So with our old journalistic friends 'immaculate' and 'meticulous'. The gentleman in 'immaculate evening dress' is someone whose clothes are not spotted or stained; for 'immaculate' does not mean 'well-cut' or 'well-fitting'; it comes from the Latin verb *maculo, maculare,* meaning to spot, to stain, to defile, to dishonour. One would suppose that even journalists and novelists had heard of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and be warned not to use the word grossly. In 'meticulous' the root-word means 'fear'; so 'meticulous' means 'a little fearful', not 'exact', 'precise' or anything else. When George Moore described himself as going to a dinner party and hearing a general give 'a meticulous account of a battle', he used the word illiterately. He should have known the distinction beautifully drawn by Sir Thomas Browne: 'Move circumspectly not meticulously', i.e. 'heedfully' (looking round) not 'timidly or fearfully'. An account of a battle cannot be 'meticulous', though it may well be 'circumstantial' or 'detailed'. Then there are the misused phrases, of which perhaps the commonest is 'only too'—'I shall be only too glad to come' or 'I shall be only too pleased to go'. 'Only too' means excess in a detrimental sense. If a detrimental sense is not intended the phrase must not be used.

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'I shall be only too glad to come, for I have long desired an opportunity of saying what I really feel'; or 'I shall be only too pleased to go, and escape from this disagreeable company'. If you mean 'very glad', or 'very glad indeed', say so; do not say 'only too glad', which implies gladness in an unpleasant sense. It was announced that a picture-gallery in Australia possessed a certain painting which the authorities would be 'only too glad to lend' to a proposed exhibition, i.e. they would be glad to get it out of their sight. But the announcement did not mean that at all; it meant that the authorities would be delighted to lend it. So precise writing must begin with a precise use of words.

The precise use of words can be learned laboriously from a very good dictionary—a bad one is worthless; or it may be learned from a writer known to be accurate in his choice of words—a writer with style: for the beginning of style is the choice of the right word. Everyone knows the advice of Johnson: 'Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and eloquent but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison.' So here we have the great Dr Johnson defying the critics, and recommending would-be writers to play the sedulous ape to Addison! But it is possible to differ from the Doctor and say paradoxically that Addison is difficult because he is so easy. There is a conversational fluency in Addison that obscures the precision of his vocabulary and the felicity of his sentences. A better model would be Johnson himself. In no other English writer can be found such exact choice of words, such consummate ordering of phrases, such lucidity of statement and such freedom from the distraction of ornament. The prose of Johnson is like the man himself, entirely honest and informed with integrity. Observe, no one is recommended to imitate Johnson's diction, for that is a personal oddity, an idiosyncracy; but Johnson's precision, lucidity and accuracy are intrinsic qualities of good prose and properly imitable. His prose can

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be taken as a model because it is a perfect diagram of language. The phrases and sentences ring out like coins struck at the Mint. This advice is offered, remember, not to born writers with a way of their own, but to those who, for the business of life, desire to make English an instrument of precision. That in Johnson's prose there are few overtones may be accounted a fault; but this very deficiency makes it the more useful as a model. We do not want overtones in the prose of statement, we want clear unmistakable meaning. In spite of his minor superstitions, Johnson was the embodiment of common sense. He made blunders in some of his critical judgements, but he made them because his common sense rejected the vague, the excessive, the remote, and he made them honestly and stated them precisely. No one ever had any doubt about Johnson's meaning.

XIII

See what happens when a person with a statement to make seeks to add some flowers of fancy to reporting. Here is a passage from *The Daily Telegraph*. As it is twenty-five years old and the writer dead, no one will be injured by the quotation:

> The years are really few...since a young native of...was brought to London to be tested, as it were, as to her fitness or otherwise for a professional career as violinist. The violinist was Miss ——, the tester the present writer. Plainly the fiat went forth that Miss —— was one of the chosen, for almost from that day to now, she has proceeded from great things even to greater, and when, after an absence in America and Canada lasting some four years, she re-appeared here at the Wigmore Hall on Saturday afternoon, and a very large audience welcomed her with that warmth which is reserved almost invariably for the truly elect, the writer naturally plumed himself and preened his feathers. For here, undeniably, was a ripe artist.... Quite beautiful is her warm tone, lovely its accuracy of intonation; fine was the vigour of the Wieniawski, and of Bach in a Prelude—superbly fine this, neat beyond words the phrasing and the delicacy and restraint of the playing of Tod Boyd's Samson Lullaby (which

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we feel sure is destined to become almost a nuisance to us, so popular is it likely to be), and high the polish of the encore piece played after the Francœur pieces. In a word, Miss ——, as solo violinist, is a Kreisler *in petto*....To hear a player who is herself filled with the joy of playing is rare—all the more, then, is it also a joy.

'Don't be flowery, Jacob,' pleaded Scrooge to Marley's ghost. This flowery passage is the result of a writer's resolve to avoid making a plain statement about plain matter of fact, and the effect of the inflation is ridiculous. None of the decorations and flourishes are organic and structural, and so the prose is entirely vicious. A writer taught by the example of Johnson would never sink to such a degradation of language. It is useless to say, 'Don't imitate at all, but be yourself'. Nearly all our life is a web of imitation shot through here and there with lines of originality. Our writing, like our opinions and conversation, is little more than an echo of our surroundings. Most people have no originality and do not want it. The clerk is content to repeat the jargon of the office without any notion of what 'as regards' or 'with reference to' may mean, and people whose literacy is supposed to exceed the clerk's go on quoting 'More honoured in the breach than in the observance' with complete misunderstanding of its meaning. 'We fear the rules of the road are more honoured in the breach than in the observance.' What abominable nonsense! If the rules of the road were more honoured in the observance than in the breach the appalling death-rate would be lowered. These rags and tags of quotation are used because they are supposed to impart a flavour of literature or give a touch of style. They merely show that people are afraid to write a plain thing in a plain way, that they will not use English as an instrument of precision. An apt quotation is a signal of comradeship from a lettered writer to a lettered reader; it is not a dragged-in, superfluous ornament. The blunted or untrained sense of words, the repetition of phrases imperfectly apprehended, the resort to slang —always a sign of weakness—these are the faults that seem

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ingrained in the current prose of the day. If we are not a literate nation, we have ostensibly ceased to be illiterate; and now that everybody writes, everybody tends to write like everybody else, that is, in the lowest common terms of prose. Here, then, the example of a great model and the quickened sense of the life in words that comes from a close examination of it becomes not merely a corrective, but a part of education. The art-student draws from life; why should the word-student be denied that privilege? Depend upon it, the nation that is muddled in its prose is muddled in its thoughts. The people who cannot say what they mean are people who do not know what they mean. Never were people so muddled as we of this nation are to-day. And why? Because we muddle our minds with words of imprecise meaning—the word 'education' being one of the most imprecise of all. Beware of all abstract nouns in politics. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity danced the Carmagnole round the guillotine.

XIV

Walter Pater suggested that our writers should make time to write English more as a learned language. He was thinking of the artists, not of the artizans; but the precept was well meant. Whatever defects may be charged against the old-fashioned classical education, it had this merit, that it forced the teachable pupils upon a choice of words that would scan and parse, sentences that would construe, and statements that appeared to have a meaning. Unfortunately, with this sense of form in Greek and Latin, there was allowed to grow up a belief that English was no language for a gentleman, and that little attention need be paid to it. So we have Saintsbury declaring, with his usual excess, that 'translation and re-translation from and into Latin is undoubtedly the surest (if not the only) way to master English writing'. That is neither useful nor true. There is no need to discuss such an assertion, for people know

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quite well that thousands of English boys have for years industriously translated and re-translated from and into Latin without attaining to immediate or subsequent mastery of English prose; they also know that most English children will never be subjected to this discipline and would resent it if imposed; they also know that Defoe, one master of English prose, had small Latin, and Bunyan, another master, none whatever. Bunyan had played the sedulous ape to the Authorized Version. This doctrine that everybody will acquire good English without effort, as a by-product of other studies, is fatal for the generality. In a few individuals, with a gift for language, the transfer takes place; in the many it simply doesn't; and the result of universal neglect is that we, as a nation, with a language of unparalleled richness, are scarcely able to write. There is no sign of improvement; for many writers, famous to-day and even respected, are guilty of unpardonable slovenliness. The prose conscience is perceptibly less active than it was in the days of Newman, Huxley, Tyndall, and Arnold. It is easy to write English badly; it is difficult to write English really well. It is easy for every one to acquiesce in the slovenly, shapeless verbosity that satisfies most people; it is difficult for any one to acquire the lucid simplicity that is a delight as well as a positive economy in the intercourse of public and social life. Here, as a last example, is a passage from a circular sent out by some one who would certainly call himself an educated Englishman:

> It was strongly felt that the Hospitals were in sore need; that their close connection with and usefulness to the schools made this appeal to the gratitude and sympathy of present and former scholars and their parents more than usually appropriate both in its objects and in training children in service and sacrifice especially of certain pleasures and the fact that no percentage of the amount collected is lost to the cause in expense of collection or creation of additional paid administration. . . .The additional ways and means are generally well-known and obviously based on the perhaps notorious greater willingness to give when something more concrete than or in addition to the pure

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pleasure of giving or of service, is obtained, some amusement, something useful, beautiful, or permanent, appeal to competition, rivalry, chance, vanity, desire for a bargain.

You will notice that this is not illiterate prose. In structure it is meant to be elaborately exact and almost pedantically formal; but because it neglects the practical and artistic principle of economy, because it does not use English as an instrument of precision, it defeats its own purpose by being unreadable. The present tendency is not in the direction of respect for anything requiring effort, for anything implying obligation. The age that produces verse that cannot sing is not likely to bestow much labour on giving its prose the fine edge of style. But the age must beware. It is a paradox of life and art that only the regular can afford to be irregular; the irregular must observe the rules. George Eliot's irregular union with Lewes was stricter than most marriages, so was Alfred Doolittle's with Liza's mother. A sonnet may break the rules, but not a sentence. You may have free verse, and perhaps free love; but you cannot have free prose. No, young reader, do not mention James Joyce, whose prose is engineered more elaborately than the most recondite works of Bach, and becomes, at last, a private language communicating so little that it might as well be unwritten.

XV

English prose has the supreme magnitude and magnificent range of English poetry. To watch its slow emergence is a fascinating historical study. Neither our reading nor our writing must be of the kind that makes us degenerate guardians of a great heritage, like the indifferent hordes who burnt the marbles of the Parthenon to lime their huts. We must keep our prose conscience active and learn to make English an instrument of precision. When it is that, it can be as much more as talent or genius pleases. The report of a recent lecture on modern English poetry is a signal example of the lapse of prose con-

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science. Unfortunately it cannot be quoted as no full text has been published; but on the evidence available it can be called an example of English prose at its worst. Every statement is an abstraction, impressive in sound, but devoid of any precise significance. The writer is not, as you might suppose, a politician but a professor of English; yet he has not learned the elementary rule that a statement should have meaning. So, having, apparently, no clear meaning to convey, he sends up a succession of gas-bags and asks us to accept as criticism a display of bombinating in the void. One longs to prescribe for him a course of Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets*, but there is the disabling fear that, if he reads as he writes, those precise and masterly pages are beyond the range of his appreciation. That, in the end, is the question we are forced upon: does the slovenly, the gaseous writer really know how to read? If he writes down sentences without form or matter, must not the sentences he reads be also without form or matter? It is difficult to see how that dismal conclusion can be avoided. So, despite the denunciations hurled against Stevenson, we might do worse than play the sedulous ape in our writing; for if we propose to imitate a sentence we shall at least be forced to discover whether it unites precision of statement with artistic economy of utterance. In these latter days, when social salvation is offered us in the form of abstract nouns, to find a sentence which does unite precision of statement with artistic economy of utterance is, like a once celebrated beverage, grateful and comforting.

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§ iii

Truth and Beauty

I

It is the sorry fate of literature to fall into the hands of schoolmasters and examiners who care for her dowry more than for her charms. 'What do you read my lord?' asks Polonius; and Hamlet answers, 'Words, words, words.' Literature in schools and places where they teach too often suffers a disintegration into words, words, words—words, not of power and persuasion, but words of Greek or Latin or Anglo-Saxon origin, about which questions can be asked and answered. And then, besides being made of words, literature exemplifies 'forms' and 'types', and illustrates 'origins', and arises out of 'movements'; and all these matters can be conscientiously taught to the plodding note-taker and be redelivered at examinations. A candidate for a university diploma in English showed me with great satisfaction a note he had been given on the change of the name Corambis in the first quarto of *Hamlet* to Polonius in the second. He was proud of this accession to his scholarship, but he had, quite literally, never read, never seen the play, though he had, of course, been lectured to about it.

Matching the class-room details at one extreme, there are, at the other, the class-room generalities—a course, let us say, on 'The Drama', from Aeschylus to Noel Coward, taken in a term (or even in two) by teachers who have some knowledge of some plays with pupils who have no knowledge of any. And after (or before) 'The Drama', there will certainly be a course on 'English Literature from the Beginnings' to—well, wherever the term's syllabus has to stop. Busy young pencils will record facts about 'The Beginnings', and, the language of

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'The Beginnings' being, of course, unknown, 'The Beginnings' will be presented in 'close-ups' of optimized description and delusive paraphrase. No one will pause to consider that medieval literature (like any other) is the embodiment of medieval thought and feeling, and that, therefore, medieval literature can hardly be understood without some understanding of medieval religion. The moving pencils write, and when examinations come round, the moving pens will redeliver.

Why do we do these things? Chiefly because we are truly and honourably anxious about literature and about our pupils. We want to do our best for both, and we worry ourselves into the activities of Martha instead of choosing the better part with Mary. We think that nothing of itself will come, but we must still be teaching. Indeed, we are so busy teaching that we give our pupils no chance to learn. One of the gravest mistakes in educational practice is the assumption that whatever we think adults ought to know must be taught to juveniles. We anticipate curiosity, and begin at once to answer the questions that no one has begun to ask. And somewhere in the back of our minds is the thought of a coming examination. It is so easy to examine students in the meanings of obsolete words, in the alleged origins of the pastoral elegy (with *Lycidas* as the provocation), in the supposed genesis of tragedy (with *Hamlet* as the body for dissection), in the whole progress of poesy and play-writing (with 'The Beginnings' and 'The Drama' as the themes), and so hard to discover the significance for young readers of a living creation. To a young student the first reading of *Hamlet* or *Religio Medici* or *Tintern Abbey* should be a great experience. The teacher who has deeply thought and deeply felt will help to give that experience: the hard-working, busy, capable teacher may bustle about like Martha and convey little but second-rate facts and second-hand information.

We are often misled by shining examples. It is the privilege of great scholars to dwell with delight upon details of resem-

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blance in the literatures of the world, and to make generalizations upon the results of immensely large and intensely savoured reading. Such scholars resemble Darwin: they reach conclusions after years of patient observation. But in the schools the teachers want to begin where the great scholars ended. They emphasize the parts before the whole is discerned, and set forth generalities to pupils who have no particulars. And so it is only too possible to find mere boys and girls ready to deliver, for instance, confident condemnations of Pope, because they 'did the Romantic Revolt' at school, and gathered that Pope was the villain of that piece. Thus, pupils who should be acquiring some standards of value acquire, instead, an illusion of knowledge. It is sometimes said that there is too much literary criticism nowadays. The truth is that there is too little. There is much chatter about authors; there is much insistence upon what happens to be 'in the mode'; but there is very little criticism. The function of criticism is to give a sense of absolute values, and to forbid the excesses of raw and hardy opinion. The only opinions worth having are those we have fought for, and even fought against. To acquire opinions before acquiring the means of forming them is a popular, but preposterous, process. Undergraduates no longer learn, they instruct. It is sometimes forgotten that the older scholars were trained in the classical tradition. Whatever may be urged against the classics as a general means of education, this, at least, will hardly be denied, that, to 'the well-born soul' the classics gave a secure critical apprehension, unseduced by quaintness, or eccentricity, or blatancy, or vulgarity. We hear much of scientific method; we hear too little of literary method. To be unliterary is as great a reproach as to be unscientific.

But the literary method and the scientific method must be really methodical. They must not be substitutes for method. The peculiar danger of a class-room course in literature is that pupils may be set up for life with third-hand and fourth-hand generalities and with a stock of details swept up by the

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industrious housemaids of literature, and never learn the need of wrestling in solitude with a great work of creative art, saying 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me'. It is not surprising that original young minds revolt from 'standard authors' diagrammatically presented, and find the genuine life of literature in some poetaster of the moment, whom they proceed to exalt against the idols of the class-room. There is nothing alarming in that. What terrifies is the thought that the less original students, instructed, examined, certificated, and totally uninspired, will themselves become teachers, and pass on a cant of literature to the young, or divert literature into a form of useful knowledge. 'The Aim in Literature', says a syllabus now before me, 'is (1) to add to the stock of ideas, to increase the vocabulary, to give the power of phrasing and sentence construction; (2) to add to the stock of facts, to give the power of reading for information....'

II

Literature, as we who use the name so lightly in syllabus and time-table seem to forget, is one of man's creative arts. It is, in a special sense, a sacred art. In the beginning was the Word. Poetry, in its deepest sense, had its origin in the solemn invocations or deprecations of the powers of light and darkness, in the murmured abasements of primitive rituals, in the dim vaticinations of terror-wielding sages. Indeed, the profane might say, that whenever man wishes to be specially obscure he resorts to poetry. But this, at least, is certain, that whenever man is deeply moved he resorts to poetry. We have only to think of the mass of verse called into existence by recent wars, of the epitaphs in country churchyards, of the old-fashioned mourning cards with their metrical condolements, of the *in memoriam* notices in the press with their sprinkles of quotation, to recognize the universal belief that words arranged in a certain order have a potency denied to words arranged in

vaticinations: pro- 102
phesies, predictions

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another order. That belief is deeply rooted in human nature. It is both indisputable and irrational, for it is proved by all experience to be true, and it belongs to the realms beyond reason. You take a few words, you put them together, and, in a way not explicable, they flash into life, and you have, not a sentence, but a song, a revelation, a new creation, a joy for ever. Almost any words will do, as Wordsworth tried to tell us, and as the poets had already proved. The people who can work this magic with words may indeed be dangerous, and perhaps Plato was right when he banished them inexorably from his Republic. Totalitarianism, by whatever name disguised, dare not allow freedom to the divine individualism of poetry.

This magical power of words arranged in a certain way can be tested upon very simple examples in verse and in prose. The difference between 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians' and 'Diana of the Ephesians is great', is as wide as the difference between a revolution and a peaceful protest. 'The vision and the faculty divine' opens a window on the infinite; 'the vision and the divine faculty' lets in no light upon us. And think of the gulf that separates 'All men are mortal' from 'Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live'; for though it may be said that the special associations of each statement account for some of the difference, that difference is instantly felt by those for whom neither statement has any associations.

The instances I have quoted are alike in mere meaning; but in power and significance they are worlds apart; and what they prove is this, that if we are to be deeply moved, truth must come to us, not as information, but as beauty. When beauty and truth are made one, and come into expression, we get great art, we get something which in some form and some degree is a necessity of human existence. 'I am certain of nothing', says Keats in a familiar passage, 'but of the holiness of the heart's affection and the truth of the Imagination. What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth.' Exactly. It

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is a mystical union. It is Dante's Trinity, 'La divina potestate, la somma sapienza e il primo amore'.

I want to insist upon this elementary difference between Truth as Beauty and Truth as Information, because it is precisely here that danger lies when literature flies in at the school-room window and is caught and imprisoned in syllabus and time-table. The danger, simply, is that the truth which is beauty will be turned into the truth which is information. It is so easy to make that fatal metamorphosis. When the old Codes demanded from Standard VI boys and girls in the Board Schools and National Schools that they should be able 'to recite 150 lines from Shakespeare or Milton, or some other standard author, and to explain the words and allusions' (and that, remember, was their sole contact with literature) what teacher and what child ever thought of poetry for poetry's sake? Nor was the plight of the higher schools, with their elaborately annotated texts, very much better. Did anyone ever learn, except accidentally, what poetry is? We are far from those days now, but we have not entirely escaped the danger. There is always the facile enthusiast, nurtured upon 'The Epic' and 'The Lyric', who will regale pupils with regurgitated note-book; and there is always the vigorous, busy realist, who will extort from poetry something that is unpoetical. My fears are not imaginary. I once gave *Ozymandias* to adult students who had been reading Shelley and asked them to say what they would do with it if they were taking it with a class of older children. Well, *Ozymandias* was to be put to unexpected uses. It was to assist in teaching the geography of Egypt; it was to illustrate the weathering of stone by sand and heat; it was to show the pleasing excitements of travel: it was to exemplify, by its irregularity, the true form of a sonnet; it was to afford a text for grammatical exercises; it was (of course) to point a moral; it was to serve other purposes; but by scarcely any one was it to be set forth as a poem, an embodied experience existing for its imaginative truth and beauty. That

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is always the danger when literature becomes a school subject. 'The lone and level sands stretch far away'—too far away to touch the precincts of the class-room.

III

What, then, is the teacher to do? With that question I pass to more cheerful considerations. In his essay called *Shakespeare; the Man*, Walter Bagehot has a useful and memorable phrase. Shakespeare's works, he tells us, could only have been produced by a first-rate imagination working on a first-rate experience. And then he adds the vital sentence: 'To a great experience one thing is essential, an experiencing nature. It is not enough to have opportunity, it is essential to feel it.' An experiencing nature! There is the touchstone that distinguishes the Shakespeares from the Southeys, the artists from the artizans. Probably the greatest quality of Joyce's *Ulysses* is the intensity of experiencing nature it reveals. How feeble, compared with its immense vitality, the contemporary epicene experiments in fiction! Dickens, our prose Shakespeare, is unique among novelists in the intensity of his experiencing nature. He seemed incapable of not experiencing everything, and his books, as a consequence, are almost embarrassing, and even disconcerting, because of the immense vitality of the creatures they contain—creatures more lively than life. We see men as trees walking; Dickens felt the very pulse of the machine. He felt (in Bagehot's phrase) every opportunity, and he transmitted his experience. For that is the next essential. An experiencing nature alone will not make a great artist. The great experience must be greatly transmitted. Some modern practitioners and theorists have denied the necessity for transmission. The vital act, they say, is self-expression. The term is almost meaningless. Of course an artist must express himself. How can he be an artist if he does not? And what else has he to express? We are all self-expressive, from the child gurgling with delight at

epicene: adj: common to both sexes.

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its own vocal ability to the man swearing in solitude at some remembered folly. But even here there is an audience: the child gurgles *to* itself and the man swears *at* himself. In any case their example does not invalidate the argument; for the special and peculiar gift of the artist is that his self-expression has interest for others. Successful artistic expression is, in fact, transmission, and cannot be otherwise. The expression which does not transmit itself is not expression. There are no mute inglorious Miltons. If a man is mute he is not a Milton. The inspired artist must tell the world. He may hate the world, or despise the world; but tell it he must. That is the prophetic impulse. Remember Jonah and the price he had to pay for refusing to tell the world. Jonah is an eternal parable of the artist refusing duty; and the very whale that swallowed him could not endure him.

Instructed by pseudo-science, critics have declared that what really matters is the creative urge, and that the true artist is concerned to obey this impulse without the least care for the effect of his work upon others. That is, at best, a half-truth; for why does he exhibit his pictures or print his poems? Is the desire for publicity part of the original urge or a new one? We, that is, the paying public, have no more interest in the artist's creative urge than we have in the beating of his heart or the inflation of his lungs; what has interest for us is the product of his creative urge, and it is we, not he, who will assess its worth. The opinion of an artist about his own work has no value; the work must be transmitted, and the present or future public will deliver judgement.

Communication or transmission, then, is the natural corollary of artistic creation. Beauty in art is achieved when a rich experience is successfully transmitted. The moments in poetry or in prose that take you by the heart, the moments in which you are rapt or transported: these are the moments in which an emotional experience is fully communicated. They are the sacramental moments of life.

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It should by this time be clear that in describing the work of the artist in receiving and transmitting an emotional experience I have also been describing the work of the teacher. What are we to do when we are confronted by a work of art? Obviously we must receive what is transmitted. We must experience it. We must receive from it its own profound conviction of truth made one with beauty. If we do not receive what the poet transmits, his work means nothing to us. If we do not respond to the emotional experience called Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, that poem means nothing to us; and we may study the life of Shelley, chatter about Harriet, find the derivation and meaning of every word, parse and analyse every sentence, trace every idea to the remotest of sources, and we shall be as far from the poem as ever. If we are not poets when we read a poem, we have not really read it. We have received nothing, and have no experience to transmit. When the teacher stands before a class to teach literature, he has become the artist—he has received an emotional experience, and must transmit that experience by ways which are the natural expression of his feelings. If he has not received the experience, he has nothing to transmit, and that is the end of the story.

There we have the vital difficulty about literature in schools. We can cheerfully put on our time-tables history, geography, science, mathematics, and languages, being sure that teachers possess or will acquire the matter to be transmitted; but we can never be sure that the lessons in literature will always be taken by teachers capable of creative experience and able to transmit the experience. We can never even be sure that the lessons in literature will be taken by teachers who really love and enjoy what they propose to transmit. Communication of enjoyment, indeed, may be called the immediate purpose of the lessons on literature. Deeper communications may follow, but they must travel in the path of love and liking. Literature may become a subject for study, but it must be first of all the object of love. High qualifications in the teacher may be a

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guarantee of information; they are no guarantee of emotional responsiveness; and so it has often happened that the best teachers of English literature have had no academic qualifications, or have come to English after a classical training, in which they learned how to read Homer and Horace naturally instead of acquiring a substitute for reading in the shape of lessons on 'The Epic' and 'The Lyric'.

So far from prescribing a repellent austerity of treatment, I set enjoyment first among the aims of the literature lesson. What is literature, after all, but a collection of the world's best sellers? The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* continue to be read because they are the world's best poems. *Hamlet* continues to be acted because it is the world's most fascinating play. What I urge is that the emphasis in the literature lessons shall be placed on these living enjoyable realities, and not on substitutes for reading them. Talks about authors and their works may have a definite value as entertainment and stimulus. Children are no more harmed by knowing the succession of English writers than by knowing the succession of English monarchs. But all that is part of literary history and biography, and we must never suppose that contact with literary history and biography is the same as contact with literature. The substitution of the lesser obligation for the greater is the crime of the class-room. There is no need for that substitution. Almost any one can teach literature who really wants to. The formula is simple; faith, love, and humility are the chief requirements. Obviously the first condition of reception is receptiveness; and receptiveness is only another name for humility. Humility is not a popular virtue; but without humility nothing can be received.

> Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much,
> Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.

Many things hidden from the clever and the knowing and the self-satisfied are revealed unto babes. 'Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter

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therein.' Art, like religion, is powerless before the insulated mind. Emotional insulation, which is a kind of vanity when it is not a kind of sloth or stupidity, is the main cause of failure in the humaner regions of school work. Teachers and pupils alike seem to arm themselves against all movements of the mind which are not mechanical; and so another cause of failure is fear, or lack of faith. Teachers, afraid of literature because they are afraid of their own souls, put up a defence-mechanism of literariness—of annotation, comment, disquisition, information, and argument about it and about, and so can neither learn nor teach; and pupils, especially pupils in early adolescence, always quick to catch the teacher's lack of conviction, soon set up their own resistance. At the present time, when 'academic' education is the popular bogy, and when manual and technical occupations are being pressed as the main concern of 'the new secondary education for all', pupils, and especially boys in the 'loutish' stage, must not be encouraged to think that they have reached the age of exemption from efforts towards graciousness of understanding and grace of expression. The humanities must not abase themselves before the overall and the oily rag. 'Hand-work' or 'craft-work' or whatever name we give it, is not the one infallible means whereby a soul may be discerned. We must resist the suggestion that the binding of books is the proper educational occupation of young persons and that the understanding of books is beneath them. Such pupils have reached the age when the animal and the spiritual are fighting within them for supremacy, when literature, 'the Word made Flesh and the Flesh made Word', therefore, is an urgent necessity of their lives. Literature, as I have said, is a discipline as well as a delight. Though it comes to us in the form of pleasure it makes demands of the mind and the soul. It is a simple fact that we rise to great creative art and do not sink to it. The mental obligations of understanding, and the moral obligations of receiving are important to the young mind. Religion for many has lost its obligations, and

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we find it difficult to reimpose them. But great poetry is still an education of the emotions. As I have written elsewhere, 'it is to poetry that we must look for inspiration and guidance; for it is poetry that, minting into shapes of beauty all vital and creative ideas gives them a permanent and undebased currency'. The range of literature in its appeal and control has been stated by Wordsworth in words which, familiar as they are, cannot be quoted too often:

> A voice shall speak, and what will be the theme?
> On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life,
> Musing in solitude, I oft perceive
> Fair trains of imagery before me rise,
> Accompanied by feelings of delight
> Pure, or with no unpleasing sadness mixed;
> And I am conscious of affecting thoughts
> And dear remembrances, whose presence soothes
> Or elevates the Mind, intent to weigh
> The good and evil of our mortal state.
> —To these emotions, whencesoe'er they come,
> Whether from breath of outward circumstance,
> Or from the Soul—an impulse to herself—
> I would give utterance in numerous verse.
> Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,
> And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith;
> Of blesséd consolations in distress;
> Of moral strength, and intellectual Power;
> Of joy in widest commonalty spread;
> Of the individual Mind that keeps her own
> Inviolate retirement, subject there
> To Conscience only, and the law supreme
> Of that Intelligence which governs all—
> I sing:—'fit audience let me find though few!'
> So prayed, more gaining than he asked, the Bard—
> In holiest mood.

These words are the teacher's guide as well as the poet's charter. The right presentation of creative literature to young pupils is thus a matter of high importance. Ways of presentation are not, at the moment, my concern. I want to expound

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the spirit of the presentation—to urge that we must present the poem for the poem's sake, the play for the play's sake, the story for the story's sake, none of them as learning or as information, but all of them as beauty, truth, and joy. A mother teaching her child the first nursery rhymes is nearer to the heart of creative literature than the teacher arresting the appeal of beauty while he explains allusions or elucidates obscurities. The lecturer instructing the future teacher and the teacher instructing the youthful pupil must both be faithful to the spirit of their undertaking. The essence of the process is the transmission, as a pleasure, of an emotional experience embodied in great expression, the necessary prelude, of course, being the reception, as pleasure, of that experience. Teachers must enjoy before they can communicate enjoyment; they must believe before they can convince, and be ardent in order to ignite. They must have faith, both for themselves and for their pupils. They must remember that literature is not a vehicle of information, or an academic pursuit. For most pupils in most schools literature is the chief means by which the developing soul is made mindful of its divine nature.

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§ iv

Bach and Shakespeare

I

COMPARISONS between one form of art and another are generally unprofitable and often mischievous. Music, poetry, painting, and sculpture have their own modes of being and must submit to certain laws and limitations prescribed, not by critical authority, but by the nature of things. Whoever it was that called architecture 'frozen music' may be allowed the metaphor, but not the comparison. Even poetry and music, the two forms of art most often described in terms of each other, are in essence unlike. Music that tries to perform the function of poetry generally fails both as poetry and as music.

We are on safer ground when we turn from arts to artists. Music and poetry are not really comparable, but musicians and poets may be. Circumstances, aims, and conditions can be similar when the means of expression are different; and doubts that perplex us in one instance may be dissipated when they are observed in another. People have clouded the name of Shakespeare with suspicion, because the obscurity of his life seems incompatible with the splendour of his genius. Let us compare, therefore, certain circumstances in the life of the greatest English poet with certain circumstances in the life of the greatest pure German musician, and see if the mystery of William Shakespeare be any deeper than the mystery of Johann Sebastian Bach. We start with this advantage, that we shall not be comparing an unknown with a still more unknown. We do know many indisputable facts about Bach. The huge biographical treatise of Spitta may not be full of grace and charm, but it is unquestionably full of facts and documents. Indeed, a Life of Bach is as liable to be choked with certainties as a Life of Shakespeare with conjectures. It

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is because the certainties may assist the conjectures that we offer the present comparison.

A noticeable difference greets us at the outset. The family of Shakespeare had no tradition of poetry; the family of Bach was solidly musical. The difference need not trouble us, for poetry is in no sense a domestic and social art, whereas it was precisely as a domestic and social, as well as a religious, art that music was sedulously cultivated in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Germany. The Bachs were clannish as well as musical, and generally contrived a yearly meeting. Forkel, Bach's first biographer, and the direct inheritor of the Bach tradition, thus describes a gathering:

> The Bachs not only displayed a happy contentedness indispensable for the cheery enjoyment of life, but exhibited a clannish attachment to each other. They could not all live in the same locality. But it was their habit to meet once a year at a time and place arranged beforehand. These gatherings generally took place at Erfurt, Eisenach, and sometimes at Arnstadt. Even after the family had grown very large, and many of its members had left Thuringia to settle in Upper and Lower Saxony and Franconia, the Bachs continued their annual meetings. On these occasions music was their sole recreation. As those present were either Cantors, Organists, or Town Musicians, employed in the service of the Church and accustomed to preface the day's work with prayer, their first act was to sing a hymn. Having fulfilled their religious duty, they spent the rest of the time in frivolous recreations. Best of all, they liked to extemporise a chorus out of popular songs, comic or jocular, weaving them into a harmonious whole while declaiming the words of each. They called this hotch-potch a 'Quodlibet', laughed uproariously at it, and roused equally hearty and irrepressible laughter in their audience.

The thirtieth variation in Bach's famous Goldberg set is a *quodlibet* in which are blended the tunes of two popular songs, the second (the air beginning in crotchets at the second bar) having the unlikely words,

> Kraut und Rüben
> Haben mich vertrieben;
> Hätt mein' Mutter Fleisch gekocht,
> So wär ich länger blieben.

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Johann Sebastian Bach himself was born at Eisenach in Thuringia, on 21 March 1685, fourth and last child of Johann Ambrosius Bach, a town musician. We know little about the boy's education in music or in letters, but it is obvious that to his father (a viola player) he owed not merely his first knowledge of music, but his extraordinary understanding of stringed instruments. In his tenth year he lost both his parents and passed into the care of his eldest brother, who was organist at Ohrdruf. Here the boy attended the Gymnasium, and was taught some music by the brother; but, apparently, not enough; for tradition relates that, being forbidden to use a certain volume of clavier pieces, little Sebastian secretly copied them all out on the moonlit nights of six months; but the transcript was discovered by his brother, who confiscated it, no doubt for the maintenance of discipline. The father and grandfather of Bach had been secular musicians; his brother was in the service of the Church; and it was in the atmosphere of church music, therefore, that the boy's formative years were passed. In 1700 Bach got a place as soprano singer in the convent school at Lüneberg; and when his voice went, as it naturally did very soon, he remained there as a violinist. In 1704 he became organist at Arnstadt; in 1707 organist at Mülhausen; in 1708 court organist and chamber musician at Weimar; and in 1717 Kapellmeister in the service of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. He failed to secure an organist's post at Hamburg, and in 1723, at the age of thirty-eight, he succeeded Kuhnau as Cantor at St Thomas's Church School in Leipzig, where he remained till his death in 1750. The Cantor ranked third in the school after the Rector and sub-Rector, and was required to have charge of all the musical instruction, vocal and instrumental, and to teach Latin in one of the classes. The last duty Bach was allowed to delegate as others had done.

Where, in this life of routine employment in petty towns and courts, is there room for the development of a mighty musician? Bach was always a subordinate, always under the

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necessity of keeping to daily hours of work, and liable to be checked, rated, and censured, as he was when he overstayed his leave in order to hear Buxtehude play. A wonderful teacher of those with the will and capacity to learn, he lacked utterly the pedagogue's power of controlling a class, and spent his energy in struggles with refractory pupils. Other ties were not lacking; for his domestic life, happy as it was, can hardly have made for freedom and self-communion. A man twice married, and the father of twenty children (even though most of them died young), needs to be vastly better circumstanced than the Leipzig Cantor if he is to find solitude in such a multitude! Did we not know the facts, should we ever have supposed that the boy so precariously taught and the man so heavily occupied would become first, the greatest player of his time on clavier and organ, and next, the writer of an incredible number of elaborate compositions of the highest rank and in nearly all departments of music? Or, given the sixty volumes of the Bach-Gesellschaft edition, and considering both their mere quantity and their artistic magnitude, should we not have been tempted to doubt whether they came from such a man if definite evidence had been lacking? There are people who find it hard to believe that the plays of Shakespeare were written by any one under the rank of a Viscount; but so far no one has suggested that the works of Bach were written by Frederick the Great, whose musical proclivities and personal relations with Bach himself might be held to give grounds for suspicion.

We must remember that the Bach we know was not the Bach known to his contemporaries. We know him as the supremely great composer; they knew him chiefly as a player. It is interesting to recall that Beethoven first established himself in Vienna, not by his compositions, but by his masterly playing of Bach's Preludes and Fugues. Bach outshone all executants of his time and enjoyed an almost legendary reputation. We do not know how he acquired his tremendous skill, neither do

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we know who taught him the technique of composition. Bach employs with supreme ease the most elaborate and intricate forms of musical architecture. He did not pour out a flood of facile tune with simple accompaniment. For him, every line of notes had to play its own independent part in the music and to combine as well with all the others. No man has surpassed him in the power of making great music out of polyphony; and no man has been able to do more with two lines of notes. Even in the simple dance forms of the French and English Suites and Partitas, his two lines sound greater than other people's four—or forty. How came he by this extraordinary command of form? Fortunately an answer—such answer as there ever can be to the riddle of creative art—may be definitely given. He was self-taught. It should be remembered that to the older masters music was a kind of skilled trade, and they might have been puzzled by the significance that modern minds attach to the word 'artist'. To the end of his life Bach was an indefatigable student, and his growing power over the resources of composition can be clearly traced in his works. His masters were all who could teach him anything. He made long journeys on foot to hear great players—to Hamburg to hear Reinken, to Lübeck to hear Buxtehude. Whenever he could he took musical holidays, in the course of which he visited most of the towns of Germany where there was something to be heard. That he never met his exact contemporary Handel was not due to lack of effort on the part of Bach. Further, he was untiring in his study of other men's inventions. As we have seen, he began as a boy the habit of assiduous transcription that remained a peculiarity of his whole life. He absorbed music as steadily as he produced it; for, like some other men of high creative power, he could turn almost anything to the nourishment of his own personal genius. And so, self-taught, he learned from everybody; and without travelling beyond his native Germany grew into knowledge of Palestrina, Caldara, Lotti, Couperin, Frescobaldi,

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Legrenzi, and Corelli, yet remained always himself, writing without lapse or deviation the music that, in the highest degree, possesses the great style, the style absolute, that is not so much impersonal as beyond all personality. The music of Bach tells us as much—and as little—of the man as the verse of Shakespeare. He made no pageant of a bleeding heart and did not turn his chagrin and disappointment into notes. If ever there was one who, with Shakespeare, can be called 'self-school'd, self-scann'd, self-honour'd, self-secure', who made the heaven of heavens his dwelling-place and trod the earth unguessed at, it was the composer of the *Matthew Passion* and the B minor Mass. Men knew the somewhat touchy Cantor of the Thomasschule and admired the prince of instrumentalists; but they knew little of the soul that heard the six-winged seraphim cry one to another, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts', and caught the surges of their song in music that echoes the thunders of the Apocalypse.

Bach used the music of others not only as matter for leisured study, but as an immediate stimulus. By all report his power of improvization appeared inexhaustible; yet he liked to be set going by something not his own. Schweitzer thus presents the tradition:

> He liked other people's music in the most uncritical way, simply because it stimulated his own creative activity. In certain cases it was an actual necessity to him. His contemporary, Magister Pitschel of Leipzig, tells us that before improvising he generally played, from the score, a work by some other man, as if he first had to set the machine of his invention going by artificial means. This fact was a matter of common knowledge. 'You know', writes Magister Pitschel to his friend, 'that the famous man who in our town enjoys the greatest reputation for music and the admiration of all connoisseurs, cannot, they say, ravish people with his own combination of tones, until he has played something from a score to set his imagination in motion.'

We are again reminded oddly of Shakespeare, who rarely, if ever, invented his own stories, but needed to be set going by some external suggestion from tale or play or history. Given

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his story, no matter how crude or ghastly, Shakespeare could transmute it into a drama thrilling with life and movement, and gleaming with matchless poetry. So potent is the art that we forget sometimes how poor is the originating substance of certain plays. In *Othello*, for instance, we are caught by the swelling tide of spiritual agony and swept along by the torrent of verse without any consciousness of the fact that not an incident in the story will bear a moment's examination. But, apparently, without the stimulus of the story, Shakespeare would never have given us Othello and Desdemona and Iago.

II

Bach had to endure from contemporary critics a reproach that deeply annoyed him. In his day music was part of a liberal education, and, conversely, the musician was expected to have studied the liberal arts, and not solely the one which he meant to practise professionally. Both ideals (if they are two, and not one) need constant reassertion, especially in the present day of specialization. Handel, Telemann, and Scheibe were university men; Bach, through the narrow circumstances of his youth, was not, and he was sometimes reminded of his deficiency. Mattheson and Scheibe, two excellent contemporary writers on music, mingled their admiration of Bach with severe reservations. In 1737 Scheibe wrote an account of Bach (the actual name being omitted) in which there was high praise for the player, but some condemnation of the compositions (of which Scheibe could have known very little) on the ground that they were turgid, obscure, and lacking in the amenities that usually proceed from a good education. Bach, greatly annoyed, asked Birnbaum, professor of rhetoric at Leipzig, to reply for him. Scheibe took this as a confession of disability on the part of the musician, and, in a letter supposed to represent the master's efforts at literary composition, made him declare that musicians have no need to bother themselves about

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philosophy and book-learning. However much Scheibe knew, he was plainly a stupid pedant.

> This great man [writes Scheibe] is not particularly well up in the sciences that are specially required of a learned composer. How can one be quite without blemishes in his musical work who has not, by knowledge of the world, qualified himself to investigate and understand the forces of nature and reason? How can one achieve all the benefits that come from the acquisition of good taste, who has barely concerned himself with critical observations, inquiries, and rules that are so necessary, not only in rhetoric and poetry, but in music, that without them one cannot possibly be moving and expressive, principally because the attributes of good and bad style in writing, both in general and particular, proceed almost entirely from these.

The charge of ignorance was ill-founded, for Bach had received a sound schooling and, at Ohrdruf, in particular, had profited by the reforms of Comenius. No uncultivated man would have possessed or could have used the considerable library in his personal possession. But can we not detect in the charge a note resembling that which, sounding faintly in Ben Jonson and such incidental persons as Henry Ramsay, Jasper Mayne, and William Cartwright, hinted that Shakespeare was ill-educated, and presently swelled into a tradition that he was a sort of freak or curiosity, needing no learning, because nature had chosen him as a passive instrument for her purpose? Even those who testified to the technical skill of Bach managed to hint that he had attained it without effort. 'Our Bach', says the Necrology in Mizler's *Musikalische Bibliothek*, 1754, 'did not engage at all in deep theoretical speculations on music, but was all the stronger in the practice of it.' So the Augustan critics thought of Shakespeare. 'All the Images of Nature were still present to him,' writes Dryden, 'and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily....Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greatest commendation: he was naturally learn'd.'

Bach, like Shakespeare, was an efficient and practical man of affairs. He was careful and scrupulous in business, and,

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though never in a post of high emolument, left a fair property at his death. Neither Bach nor Shakespeare had the 'artistic temperament' that the Skimpoles allege to excuse their raids upon the pockets of others. The musician and the poet alike worked for their living and paid their way like respectable citizens. Never was the sanity of true genius better exemplified than in Bach and Shakespeare. They could not, as Coleridge did, exist upon delusions and subscriptions, in a perpetually suspended condition of 'just sending to the press a treatise on the Logos or Communicative Intelligence, in two volumes of six hundred pages each', not a line of which was written or ever would be written. Not for Bach and Shakespeare could there be the solemn dedication and novitiate of Milton, or the long leisure of Wordsworth, or the gigantic gambling of Wagner upon a distant success. What they did had to be done at once. Shakespeare had to provide plays for My Lord Chamberlain's men; Bach had to provide music for court or church use.

> He is most marvellous [wrote Zelter to Goethe in 1827] when he is in a hurry, and not in the humour. I possess manuscripts of his, where he has thrice begun and then erased again; he could not get it to go, but the music must be forthcoming, for next Sunday there was some inevitable wedding or funeral before him. Even the very worst foolscap paper seems to have been scarce at times, but the work had to be done; little by little he gets into the swing, and at last the great artist is there, Bach's very self. Afterwards he makes his improvements, quite as an afterthought, and with his cramped penmanship, becomes so dark, misty, and learned, using his own signs, which every one is not acquainted with, that I have to refrain almost entirely from meddling with his manuscripts, because I find it no easy matter to get away from them again.

In a sense all the works of Bach are music-master's compositions, written because they were needed for practical use, and not (apparently) because they cried aloud within him for birth. He wrote, as Shakespeare wrote, to fulfil his obligations, and without any parade of what a modern would be sure to

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call his artistic conscience or his creative urge. There was no room in his busy life of musical activity for manifestos about art, and he appeared not to know the importance of being eccentric. Bach had nothing to do with art for art's sake, being too much occupied with art for God's sake. He therefore found no incompatibility between the pursuit of music as an art and the practice of music as a calling, because for him both were included in the greater ideal of duty. The attitude of Bach to music can be seen in the couplet inscribed on the *Orgelbüchlein*:

> Dem höchsten Gott allein zu Ehren,
> Dem Nächsten draus sich zu belehren,

and in a passage among the rules and principles of accompaniment written for his pupils:

> Figured bass...is the most perfect foundation of music. It is executed with both hands in such a manner that the left hand plays the notes that are written, while the right adds consonances and dissonances thereto, making an agreeable harmony for the glory of God and the justifiable gratification of the soul. Like all music, the figured bass should have no other end and aim than the glory of God and the recreation of the soul; where this is not kept in mind there is no true music, but only an infernal clamour and ranting.

With Bach, to be false to music was worse than to be false to art: it was to be false to God. He served his art with purity and probity because he served God thereby in the labour that is also prayer.

III

Even in certain material limitations of their art these two great spirits were strangely alike. We all feel how inadequate to the power of *Lear*, the breadth of *Hamlet*, and the depth of *Macbeth* must have been the wretched booths that passed in Shakespeare's day for theatres. If we could be vouchsafed a vision of the poet's own life, we should probably find nothing to amaze us more than the disproportion between the magnitude of Shakespeare's genius and the meagreness of the

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material for making that genius manifest. It is, of course, the way of great art both to fit itself to material conditions and to transcend them. The dramatist must write first of all for the theatre of his own age if he is to live in the theatre of another. The musician must write for the players and singers of his own day before he can reach the players and singers of a day to come. Bach, like Shakespeare, took what means the time provided, and wrote for what was there, not for what was absent. 'Even in Lüneberg', says Spitta, describing Bach's early years, 'the ill-luck began which pursued the greatest of German organists all his life through; for he had always to do the best he could with small or bad organs, and never had a really fine instrument at his command for any length of time.' In choral music his state was even worse. At Leipzig, in the great period of the Cantatas and Passions, he could have had no more than twenty players for his orchestra and about the same number for his choir; and even these varied as pupils came and went. 'Certainly', says Schweitzer, 'many a Cantata is orchestrated as it is, simply because at that particular time Bach had only those instruments at his disposal.' The *Matthew Passion* is the greatest music-drama ever written. We need not search for epithets, we can simply say that it is always at the level of its awful theme. If we are amazed to think that parts in Shakespeare associated with the names of Sarah Siddons or Ellen Terry were first enacted by theatre-boys, it should amaze us no less to think that the arias and recitatives of the *Matthew Passion* were first sung by school-boys, and that the instrumental parts, difficult enough to modern professional players, were performed by pupils in the school and artizans in the town band. The opening chorus of the *Matthew Passion* is one of the miracles of music, with its surging lines of sound, its dramatic exclamations, and its chorale melody ringing clear above all like an assertion of hope in a tumult of despair; and yet to perform this miracle Bach had barely three voices to a part. We, accustomed to a band

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of seventy or eighty and a chorus of three hundred and fifty, find it as hard to imagine the slender performance at St Thomas's in 1729 as Bach would have found it to envisage the Queen's Hall orchestra packed with its singers and players two centuries later.

The advantage is not entirely with us. Just as we sometimes get excellent performances of Shakespeare when sheer poverty prevents an extravagance of presentation and drives the producer back upon the play itself, so we sometimes hear better performances of Bach in small churches than in great concert halls. If Bach had for his mighty choral effects nothing like the mass of sound that they appear to need, he had a balance of vocal and instrumental tone that we rarely hear. Moreover, it is certain that his arias and recitatives were better sung by his boys than they are now by some of the ladies and gentlemen who adorn our platforms as soloists. Bach is dramatic, but he is not operatic; and to sing his solos in the *ad captandum* manner of the opera is to achieve disaster. The vulgarization of Shakespeare's marvellous descriptive passages with *tableaux vivants* on the stage is no worse a desecration than the spectacle of a popular contralto declaiming 'Erbarme dich' as if she were singing 'O mio Fernando'. Happily, in later years, we have had the fine performances of the Bach Cantata Club and the almost perfect rendering of the whole *Matthew Passion* by the Bach Choir. We have been compelled to get away from the showy concert-room performance of Bach as we have had to get away from the showy stage performance of Shakespeare, and for the same reason, namely, that the show inevitably injures the piece.

Bach and Shakespeare accepted not only current conditions but current forms. They were not innovators; they were content to take what they found and make the best of it. Shakespeare is the child of his dramatic ancestors. He gave us no new forms of drama or verse; he simply filled the old forms with a new content. Shakespeare's plays are not different from Marlowe's or Kyd's, they are merely better plays of the same

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kind, just as Mozart's operas are not different from Cimarosa's or Paisiello's, but merely better operas of the same kind. So Bach took the current musical forms—some of them imposed by the conditions of his office—and gave the dry bones an unimagined life. Fugue, Chorale Prelude, Motet, Concerto, Suite, Cantata, Passion, Mass—all were there before him, and he was content to take them and bend them to his will.

IV

Shakespeare and Bach appear to have been satisfied with the existence of their works as matter for performance, and to have taken no care to secure for them the perpetuity of print. When Shakespeare died sixteen of his plays had been printed, but not, apparently, with his consent or co-operation. The rest remained in some manuscript form at the theatres, and were published by the piety of friends in the Folio of 1623. No attempt was made to separate the work of other men from Shakespeare's own, or even to indicate mixed authorship; and to-day we have no certainty that all of Shakespeare's work is included in the collection called by his name, and considerable certainty that some of the work included is not his. The new taste imported from France at the Restoration made Shakespeare seem archaic or uncouth, and though he was never forgotten, he became old-fashioned and increasingly difficult to read. For stage use it was found necessary to re-write or adapt him, and it was in mangled versions that the contemporaries of Davenant and Dryden knew his plays. Not till the edition of Rowe appeared in 1709 did Shakespeare begin to pass regularly into the intellectual life of later generations, and even then he was presented with editorial conjectures, well-meant and even necessary, but nevertheless departures from the old texts. On the stage the adapter still held sway. The versions of Cibber and Tate gratified the taste of the eighteenth century, and actors like Charles Kean and Henry Irving presented to the nineteenth

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better versions certainly, but never whole plays. In the ordinary theatre no one ever attempted to put on the stage a plain unaltered version of any play by the man who received general lip-homage as our greatest poet and dramatist.

How did Bach fare? He died in 1750 and was speedily forgotten by all but a few. He had trodden the earth unguessed at even by the sons he had laboriously trained. Three of them, Wilhelm Friedemann, Carl Philipp Emanuel, and Johann Christian, became considerable musicians, but they were less concerned for their father's fame than for their own. The last, the old man's Benjamin, became in later years a feature of London musical life, but he troubled little about his father, and always referred to him as 'the old perruque'. When Burney visited Germany in 1772 it was Emanuel, not Sebastian, who was the great Bach. The eighteenth century wanted a Dryden in music, and found him in Handel, a great but different musician, whose works had more obvious qualities of popularity than Bach's. Thanks to *Messiah*, Handel has retained his appeal to the English character; but few of his large-scale choral works are now performed. During the nineteenth century massive 'Handel Festivals' became almost national institutions, and there were many people for whom Handel meant music, and music Handel. The author of *Erewhon* was the last of the Handelians.

But the music of Handel was at least available; the music of Bach was not. Very few of his compositions had been printed, the bulk of them being still in manuscript, and liable to the gradual attrition that is the universal lot of such music. Thus, the Necrology, confirmed by Forkel, declares that Bach wrote five complete cycles of Cantatas for the ecclesiastical year. If this is true, there should be many more than the hundred and ninety we possess. One great organ work survives only in a copy made by a pupil; another was recovered from the hands of a shopkeeper. That we have so much is almost a miracle. Bach, like Shakespeare, left no instructions about his

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manuscripts, and those in his possession were shared by Friedemann and Emanuel, who lent them for a fee to those desirous of studying or performing them. Friedemann, an able but dissolute person, soon disposed of his share, and what remained at St Thomas's may or may not have been carefully preserved, for J. A. Hiller, who became Cantor in 1789, endeavoured (according to Zelter) 'to fill the *Thomaner* boys with horror at the crudities of Bach', and may therefore have viewed the pile of Cantatas without special kindness. Barely one of the works we associate with the name of Bach was in print. *The Well-tempered Clavier*, the great organ compositions, the Concertos, the Passions, the Mass, were all unprinted, and apparently dead for ever. But slowly the work of revival went on, and we should hold in special honour the names of the first pioneers, Forkel, Rochlitz, and Zelter, the last of whom builded better than he knew when he fired the old Goethe and the young Mendelssohn with his enthusiasm. Perhaps the crucial date in the history of the Bach revival is 1829, when, exactly a hundred years after its birth, the *Matthew Passion* was performed at Leipzig under the direction of Mendelssohn, who, with Edward Devrient, had wrung a growling consent from old Zelter, the owner of the manuscript, which he had bought at the price of waste paper. The impression made by the work was tremendous, the hushed silence, as Fanny Mendelssohn tells us, being broken only by the ejaculations of people under the stress of deep emotion. Two other performances rapidly followed, and thus, by strange but not inappropriate irony, a Jew and an actor gave back to Christendom for ever the one imperishable setting of its central tragedy.

The *John Passion* was performed at Berlin in 1823, and part of the Mass in the following year. In 1835 the people of Berlin were privileged to hear what Bach himself had never heard, a performance of the B minor Mass as a whole—though, of course, serious cuts were made, as in the *Passion* at Leipzig. *The Christmas Oratorio* (really a series of six cantatas) was not

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performed until 1858. After several publishers had made attempts to bring out editions of certain works, the Bach-Gesellschaft was formed in 1850, a hundred years after the master's death, for the purpose of producing a complete edition. The first volume appeared in 1851, the sixtieth in 1900. Much revision still remains to be done, for in the *corpus* of Bach, as of Shakespeare, there are works of questionable authenticity. Like Shakespeare, too, Bach has suffered from his friends. Editorial performing directions have been scattered as freely over the text of Bach as editorial stage directions have been scattered over the text of Shakespeare. Even the faithful Forkel and Zelter felt bound to re-write Bach as Dryden and Davenant, or Tate and Cibber, had felt bound to re-write Shakespeare; and, to complete the parallel, as the star actor adapted Shakespeare for the better exhibition of his own magnificence, so Liszt and Bülow adapted Bach for *virtuoso* display at the piano. Strangely enough, the real Bach and the real Shakespeare seemed to return together, for Bach became as popular at the old Queen's Hall under the direction of Henry Wood as Shakespeare at the Old Vic under the direction of Lilian Bayliss and Robert Atkins. It was at last possible to hear almost the whole of Shakespeare uncut. The late Harold Samuel's 'Bach Weeks' exhibited a vast range of the clavier works, including the *Air with Thirty Variations* (or *Goldberg Variations*), without resort to transcriptions.

How rapidly appreciation has advanced can be seen from such a book as Albert Schweitzer's, a monumental tribute to the great musician, though not without some questionable details. The first English edition is dated 1911, a time, as we must remind ourselves, at which broadcasting had no existence and the gramophone was still crude and unadventurous. Thus he writes:

> As regards our musical public the conditions are not so satisfactory. To expect to hear the complete Bach in our concert-rooms would be to experience many disappointments. Our pianoforte virtuosi give us transcriptions of the organ works rather than original piano compo-

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sitions—on what grounds is not apparent. Why must it always be the A minor prelude and fugue that is given to the public? Even in Liszt's arrangement they are merely makeshifts on the piano. Where can we hear, except rarely, performances of the Suites (i.e. the clavier Suites), *The Well-tempered Clavichord*, *The Italian Concerto*, *The Chromatic Fantasia*, the C major Concerto for two pianos? Where are the Brandenburg orchestral concertos and the orchestral suites securely fixed in our programmes?

Even more to be lamented is the recent craze for presenting the great organ works in orchestral transcriptions. But an answer to Schweitzer's impassioned questions can easily be given. All these things, and much more, can be heard in England. They appear regularly in concert programmes, they are frequently broadcast, and all, except the French and English Suites for clavier, have been recorded for the gramophone. The whole of the B minor Mass, the whole of *The Well-tempered Clavier*, and the whole of the *Air with Thirty Variations* can be had on gramophone disks. Four of the six wonderful Sonatas and Partitas for violin solo have been recorded by Busch, Szigeti and Menuhin and four of the six 'cello suites by Casals. We can never have too much Bach, but we cannot justly complain that he is neglected. Among the least known of his works must be put the great series of Cantatas, religious and secular, and the extraordinarily beautiful Chorale Preludes for the organ. The Cantatas, as a whole, are not easily accessible, but the Chorale Preludes have been published in several editions, and some are popular in transcriptions for the piano. The Chorale Preludes are specially appealing. They are the most intimate of all Bach's compositions. These, he seems to say, I write for myself alone, and into them I breathe my spirit.

V

The eclipse and revelation of Bach may be called, without exaggeration, the most astonishing event in the history of music. Heartening, too, as well as astonishing, for a real

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creation, it seems, cannot be entirely destroyed. Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven were recognized as great masters in their lifetime. They have become better known, but they have not had to be discovered. When Bach died on 28 July 1750 not a single person then living knew that one of the world's mightiest musicians had passed away. He was respectfully regretted as a composer and more widely lamented as a great organist. The actual amount of esteem accorded to his creative work can be measured from one example, which deserves to be recorded in detail. At some time during 1749, Bach, already threatened with blindness, began to work at a vast exposition of contrapuntal art by composing a set of fugues upon one subject, sometimes varied slightly, sometimes inverted, and sometimes joined with other subjects. There are thirteen complete fugues, simple, double, or triple, and four canons. Two of the fugues (XII and XIII) are 'mirror' fugues, that is, they are totally invertible. Contrapunctus XIII (Bach, in this work, uses the word 'contrapunctus', not 'fugue') was arranged by the composer himself for two claviers, with a free part written in for the second player. Very unusually, the work was engraved as it progressed, under the supervision of Carl Philipp Emanuel, and Bach made some corrections which have fortunately been preserved. But the end was near. Bach was almost blind and lay in a darkened room. From his bed he dictated a new version of an old Chorale Prelude to which he gave the prophetic words 'Vor Deinem Thron tret ich hiermit', and passed away, in death as in life, the devout servant of God.

Among his papers there was a large unfinished fugue with four subjects. The first two were fully developed and Bach came to the third, which, for the first and last time in all his practice, was his own name spelt musically, that is, B flat, A, C, B natural. Was this fugue meant to be part of this great work? Emanuel had no doubt about it, and had it printed, incomplete as it was, with a final footnote that reads now like a touch of tragedy, 'Über dieser Fuge, wo der Nahme

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B.A.C.H. im Contrasubject angebracht worden, ist der Verfasser gestorben'. Emanuel called the work *Die Kunst der Fuge*, and, to give it a conclusion, he printed the dictated Chorale. What happened next? The last composition of the great Bach was offered for sale and found few purchasers. Emanuel tried it again with a laudatory preface by Marpurg. By 1756 barely thirty copies had been sold, and, as the receipts did not cover the cost of engraving, Emanuel sold the plates as waste metal. Thus, six years after his death, Germany, the land of music, valued Bach at thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued.

The work was a puzzle in more senses than one. It was written in open score with the old soprano, alto and tenor clefs, without a title, and without the least indication of instrument or instruments. Later critics regarded it with suspicion. If a work bears no label, how are the critics to know whether it is good or bad? Schweitzer is very distrustful of the whole work, very dubious about the fourteenth unfinished fugue, and definitely calls the thirteenth the last. Parry discusses the work without enthusiasm—almost as if he were afraid of it—and says: 'The greater part of it does not come within the range of practical music at all, and Bach could never have intended it to be presented to an audience as a consistent work of art.' That sentence will not do. It is thoroughly bad criticism. It contains two entirely different kinds of assertion, neither of which is valid: (1) that the work does not come within the range of practical music, and (2) that Bach could never have intended to present it to an audience as a consistent work of art. Bach was, as we have seen, as entirely practical as Shakespeare. Is it likely that, in the last months of his life, a practical composer would have devoted his labour to the compilation of musical theorems which could never be played at all? Did Shakespeare mean *The Tempest*, with its aery magic so elusive in performance, to be a piece of unactable dramatic theory? And then, Parry, with some undefined notion of 'a consistent work of

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art', must needs drag in an audience. Really we must not write about music as if its one reason for existence is an audience! The great privilege of music is that it can be the most private as well as the most public of the arts. However, *The Art of Fugue*, as we are compelled to call it, vanished from the world and lay dead for a century and a half. There were, as we shall see, a few indications that it once existed. Then, in our own time, it began to show unmistakable signs of life. Busoni used the unfinished fugue in his enormous *Fantasia contrappuntistica*, a work which seemed to overwhelm its composer, as he was never quite sure what to do with it. In 1924 an adventurous young Switzer, Wolfgang Graeser, wrote an article about it, produced a new edition in 1926, and at last made a skilfully varied orchestral version of the whole of it, which was played by the London Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Fritz Weisbach. Graeser used Emanuel's version, that is to say, the work softly faded out as the last notes written by Bach were reached, and the organ made a quiet conclusion with the death-bed Chorale. The performance, repeated later, made a deep impression upon all who heard it.

During the nineteenth century the work was reprinted, notably in the Bach-Gesellschaft edition (1878), under the careful supervision of Wilhelm Rust. But the unfinished Contrapunctus remained a fragment. The musical detectives were singularly blind in ignoring various clues to the mystery of this movement and of the work itself. Fortunately for us Bach had begun to use his third subject, the name B.A.C.H., for no detective, however ingenious, could possibly have divined Bach's intention to sign his last work with his own name. But, with three of the four subjects given, was it quite impossible to deduce the fourth? The invaluable Nottebohm, to whom we owe so much, conjectured that the missing theme was exactly what might have been supposed. Bach had begun with two subjects not already used, and had written his name openly as the third: would he not have ended by going back

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to the very beginning, thus plainly declaring 'the wheel is come full circle'? So the original motto-theme, first inverted and then direct, is the missing fourth subject. Riemann adopted Nottebohm's suggestion and wrote a short coda embodying the fourth theme; but our own Donald Francis Tovey went much further and wrote a full conclusion on Bach's own scale. This is not so hardy as might appear. No one could write concluding movements for an unfinished symphony, sonata or quartet. But a fugue with four subjects is almost a mathematical theorem, and a gifted contrapuntist, with most of its data before him, can bring it to the inevitable conclusion. We cannot know exactly how Bach would have reached his conclusion, but we can certainly say that Tovey's bold effort is satisfactory. The problem of performing the whole work has proved just as soluble. Musical detectives had ignored two important clues. Mozart, when visiting Leipzig, was shown some of Bach's manuscripts and heard one of the motets. He was deeply interested, and subsequently arranged five of the clavier fugues for string quartet in order that the parts should be quite clear. (In a two-stave score the inevitable crossing of parts may be confusing.) Now Bach had written his last work in open score so that the parts should be quite clear. If five fugues can be played by a string quartet, why not fourteen? Further, Bach himself had arranged the 'mirror' Contrapunctus XIII for two claviers. If one fugue can be played on two claviers, why not fourteen? Bach, let it be remembered, was throughout his life accustomed to transferring music for one kind of instrument to another; and we can feel sure that when he wrote this last work in open score without any indication of instrument, he meant, not, as Parry suggests, that it was never to be played at all, but that it could be played at will upon any instrument or combination of instruments. Tovey declared that it was all unmistakable key-board music, and that, with the exception of the mirror-fugues, it could be played by one pair of hands—hands, we should add, large enough to stretch occasional tenths.

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We have now an almost embarrassing choice of versions, and the governing principle is the avoidance of monotony in a long work in eighteen movements (if we include the Canons), all in D minor. There is Graeser's orchestral arrangement, already mentioned. There is a rendering by the Roth Quartet with the last Contrapunctus completed by Tovey at the piano. This has been recorded on ten Columbia disks, without the four Canons, which, though ingenious and attractive, are not a necessary part of the work. There is still another arrangement (also without the Canons) divided between a consort of violin, viola and two 'cellos, two pianos, and an organ for the final Chorale, as this version leaves the last Contrapunctus as the dying composer left it. In this form the work was played to a war-time audience at the now historic National Gallery Concerts. Finally we have the complete text in open score, edited by Tovey, and published by the Oxford University Press, with interesting appendices which it would be irrelevant to discuss here. An orchestral version of the complete work, with Tovey's ending, was broadcast in 1946. The wise will acquire the score and the records and, if really wise, will neither attempt to consume it at one fell swoop nor defeat enjoyment by an impossible effort to follow the parts. The effect, not the parts, should be listened to. It will be seen that the refutation of those who discredited the work is now complete. This very remarkable story is worth recording as an example of how a great work by Bach was born, seemed to die with his death, lay unperformed for a hundred and eighty years, and slowly came back to an abundant life. It is not yet well known, for it is virtually a new discovery. But who can foretell its fate? It may become as popular as the six Brandenburg Concertos, which were not even printed till 1850. Shakespeare summed up his magic in his last mystery-play, *The Tempest*; Bach summed up his magic in his last mystery-work, *The Art of Fugue*.

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VI

Shakespeare was not forgotten so completely as Bach; but he was neglected, misunderstood, mishandled, misinterpreted, and has survived all the injuries done to him. His work seems such a mystery that twisted minds have been moved to ask whether this prosaic and somewhat litigious actor can have been the writer of great plays to which he appears, by modern standards, to have been indifferent. The limited and uneventful life of Bach from the organ stool at Arnstadt to the Cantor's seat at Leipzig offers a curious parallel. The letters that survive reveal nothing of the great musician, but something of a man with a certain personal touchiness. They provide evidence to show that Bach contended vigorously for his rights as a man and his precedence as a public servant, and was as solicitous of a titular honour from the King of Saxony as Shakespeare was to establish his right to a grant of arms; but they offer no evidence to show that he cared about the fate of his works or even recognized their supreme greatness. The mystery of Shakespeare is no greater than the mystery of Bach.

As usual, the real mystery is not that which is generally assumed. The mind that doubts whether this provincial Englishman or that provincial German, self-taught, self-developed, without advantage of high culture or easy station, could so have passed the bounds of space and time in works of which no praise can be too extravagant, inevitably makes the blunder of trying to find reasons for that which is above all reason. The spirit of great creative genius lights upon whom it will, and we cannot explain it. That is the mystery. People sometimes talk as if a mass of learning could make a Shakespeare. They can appreciate the knowledge that becomes an excrescence, but not the knowledge that becomes experience. They can understand the acquisitive mind, but they misunderstand the creative mind. The dubious life of Shakespeare is thus their happy hunting-ground, as the life of Bach would be if less were known about it.

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The likeness between these great artists extends beyond material circumstances. Bach, like Shakespeare, is for all time and for all men. He is a universal genius, the last of the medieval composers and the first of the moderns. Just as no poet can write without some influence from Shakespeare, so no musician can be left untouched by Bach. The best of Bach, like the best of Shakespeare, has an idiom that transcends its own age, and becomes the speech of every age. They are the greatest masters of rhythmic utterance we know, and the magic with which they set rhythm against metre they might have learned from each other. In their moments of simplicity as well as in their flights of complicated beauty they can achieve in triumph effects too audacious for lesser men. It is almost amusing to recall that both have been denounced for their incorrectness and indifference to rules. There is in both a largeness and breadth of understanding, a sense of human joys as well as of human tears. With less opportunity for its exhibition than fell to Shakespeare, Bach had a feeling for character, for humour, and for action, so we may properly regret that his secular vocal works are so few. What he might have done can be seen in *Phœbus and Pan* and the humorous distraction of the father's complaint in the *Coffee Cantata*. The *Matthew Passion* is a drama most wonderfully laid out, and what seems to move us most in it is the pity and terror of the human failure. From its dramatic opening to the lovely choral epilogue that uplifts the soul at the end, the tragedy is complete and unfaltering, both in its great design and in its details. Here we can see most clearly Bach's power both to sustain the majesty of a theme and to grip the heart with the poignant beauty of a phrase. Turn, for instance, to his narrative of Peter's treason and mark the setting of the words, 'And he went out and wept bitterly'. It is Shakespearian.

Finally, let us notice both in Bach and in Shakespeare a moving reticence—an almost overwhelming impersonality that seems at odds with what we know of the men themselves.

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Which of his fellows ever saw the Shakespeare who wrote *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*? To discuss whether Shakespeare was Catholic or Protestant seems almost childishly irrelevant. What had that divining soul to do with sects? We know that Bach (who nevertheless possessed the sermons of Tauler) was officially a Lutheran; yet the B minor Mass is not a flourish of orthodoxy, but the vision of one who reached beyond the stars to the country of the soul. To this clear consciousness of the eternal we can attribute his quiet content to write for instant service and to let the future go.

> The unique thing about him [says Schweitzer] is precisely the fact that he made no effort to win recognition for his greatest works, and did not summon the world to make acquaintance with them. Hence the kind of consecration that rests upon his works....They discourse to us of something that will be imperishable simply because it is big and true, something that was written, not to win recognition, but because it had to come out of him....Bach himself was apparently not conscious of the extraordinary greatness of his work....He never dreamed that his works alone, not those of the men around him, would remain visible to the coming generations....No one was less conscious than he that his work was ahead of his epoch. In this respect he stands, perhaps, highest among all creative artists. His immense strength functioned without self-consciousness, like the forces of nature; and for this reason it is as cosmic and copious as these.

Zelter had recognized this a century earlier. Writing to Goethe in 1827 he exclaims: 'Even when every criticism made against him is allowed, this Leipzig Cantor is one of God's own phenomena—clear, yet never to be cleared up.' So might an Englishman write of Shakespeare.

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§ v

The Operas of Mozart

I

THE operas of Mozart are unique. They hold a supreme place both among musical works for the stage and among musical works of any kind. Gluck and Wagner, Verdi and Rossini wrote operas variously remarkable, but they wrote little else. Bach and Brahms, who wrote almost everything, wrote no operas, and Beethoven but one. Haydn and Schubert did indeed write operas, but their stage compositions have failed to survive in the theatre, and are barely known even by name. Mozart was so complete a musician that, except perhaps in pure song, his best works of any kind take rank with the best of that kind by whomsoever written. But his operas take rank with no others. They stand alone. Like the plays of Shakespeare, they have no competitors. *Le Nozze di Figaro*, produced in 1786, remains, after a hundred and sixty years of continuous stage life, entirely fresh, gay, youthful, and untouched by any revolutions in musical fashion. Upon the works of Wagner the shadows are already darkening; the great operas of Mozart have lost not a gleam of their original brightness. The reason is clear. The genius of Mozart was purely musical; the genius of Wagner was restless and multiform. Mozart was not an innovator—indeed, it is difficult to name a creative artist of the first rank who was. Wagner wanted to re-shape everything, from the books of words to the governance of the world. He wanted to be musician, poet, dramatist, critic, producer, philosopher, and reformer, and he wanted to be all these things at once. Mozart just wanted to write music.

Opera is so strange a medley of the arts that some people

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think it ought not to exist; but the paradox of opera is this, that it may invoke the aid of many arts but must live by one alone. Opera is just *opera in musica*. Whatsoever will not serve the purpose of music is a dead weight upon opera and will drag it down. Wagner, the composer of opera nearest Mozart in rank, specially illustrates the peril of substituting a medley of the arts for the simple operatic form. His works resemble the Drury Lane drama in the days of Augustus Harris, when the stage sought to present the realism of fire, flood, tempest, and catastrophe. In every Wagnerian opera the composer is defeated by the theatricalist. Wagner (always a pioneer) was before his time. The proper sphere of his magnoperating genius had not been discovered. *Das Rheingold* could be perfectly given at the cinema; *Così fan tutte* could not. Even in *Die Meistersinger*, the beautiful scene at the beginning of the third act is ruined, first by Wagner the prose theorist (disguised as Hans Sachs), who expounds the principles of composition and makes the unhappy Walther serve up all his attempts at a prize song, and next by the supposed villain, Beckmesser, who re-enacts in dumb-show the riot-scene lowered to the plane of farce. Wagner never said anything once that he could say twice. Neither of these interpolations is operatic or even dramatic. The first is a chapter of a novel; the second a scene in a film. When pure music reasserts itself in the quintet we are ready to fall at the composer's feet and forgive him everything. These examples will serve to illustrate by contrast the special excellence of Mozart. From the supernatural tempest in *Idomeneo* to the fire and water scenes in *Die Zauberflöte*, the operatic effects of Mozart never leave the realm of pure music. He wrote them as he wrote the G minor Symphony and the G minor Quintet. The instinct that forbade him to write a quintet like a symphony also forbade him to turn an opera into a 'super-show' of the exhibitive arts. Schikaneder might require Sarastro to enter in a car drawn by lions; but Mozart made no attempt to fit the situation with music appropriate to lions or to cars.

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Before we pass to a brief consideration of Mozart's operas in detail we must first place the composer himself in time. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born at Salzburg on 27 January, 1756, son of Leopold, a musician at the archiepiscopal court. The other Wolfgang, Goethe, was then turned six, and was to outlive his younger contemporary by forty years. A Mozart-Goethe 'Faust' is therefore among the great possibilities that never happened, because Goethe delayed the publication of his work. The outstanding Mozart-Goethe piece is *Das Veilchen*, a lovely song, first of a long line of German *Lieder*. Of contemporary musicians, Handel was seventy-one, and near his end; Gluck was forty-one, Haydn twenty-three. Bach had been dead for nearly six years. In England, Johnson's *Dictionary* had just appeared; in Europe, India and America, the Seven Years' War was about to begin a redistribution of power that lasted up to our own century. Though he was the most perfectly organized natural musician we know, Mozart's career as a composer of opera followed a normal course, for he began with immaturity and ended with failure. In 1768, at the age of twelve, he wrote two little pieces, *La Finta Semplice* (The Pretended Simpleton) and *Bastien und Bastienne*, the one in Italian and the other in German, as befitted the future composer of the greatest Italian and the greatest German opera. There is no need for surprise at the boy's precocity. He was cradled in music. Music was his first natural speech and his first acquirement. But Wolfgang did not lisp in numbers, because Leopold was not the kind of father or the kind of teacher to tolerate lisping. The eighteenth century regarded harmony and counterpoint as skilled trades and had no place of honour for musical infantilism. By the age of twelve Mozart was thoroughly grounded in musical form and expression; and, even had his native genius been less, could have put together the expected numbers of a miniature opera as readily as a bright boy up for an Eton scholarship can put together the expected string of Latin verses. It is not sur-

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prising that Mozart wrote little operas at twelve; it would be surprising if he had written none.

La Finta Semplice is slightly difficult to place. The little opera was part of an ambitious father's plan to exploit the talent of his marvellous son, and he almost certainly revised it. An opera by a boy of twelve, performed at the Imperial Opera of Vienna, seemed to promise immediate cash and future profits. But Leopold was defeated. He declared, perhaps rightly, that the older musicians, jealous of a mere child, united to prevent the promised performance. Certainly the manager, who had once seemed well-disposed, became definitely ill-disposed, and the little work was not given in Vienna. It was first played in Salzburg by the command of Archbishop Sigismund in 1769. *Bastien und Bastienne*, produced in 1768 at the house of the celebrated Dr Mesmer, whose name has given a word to the dictionaries and whose art is gaily immortalized in *Così fan tutte*, is an operetta of great originality. The first theme of the overture anticipates the first theme of the *Eroica Symphony*, a coincidence specially startling to one who happened to know the opera before he knew the symphony. Though not intrinsically important, *Bastien und Bastienne* has one special interest: it gives a hint of Mozart's greatest operatic gift, the power of drawing a character musically. Papageno is not more clearly distinguished from Tamino than is the mock Magician from the two lovers, and his conjuration, 'Diggi, Daggi', is as characteristic as Leporello's 'Notte e giorno faticar'. There is perhaps a moral in Mozart's operatic début. *Bastien und Bastienne* was performed through private enterprise; *La Finta Semplice* was rejected through the intrigues in a state opera-house.

The child-musician having been industriously hawked by his father round central Europe, London, and Paris, was taken to Italy in 1769, the year of Napoleon's birth. To the boy himself the richest result of the Italian tour was neither his personal success nor a commission from Milan for a new opera,

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but his first acquaintance with a truly scholarly musician, Padre Martini, whom he met at Bologna. The passing of Mozart from the narrow formalism of Leopold to the wider vision of Martini was like the passing of Hazlitt from his Hackney College to his first acquaintance with Coleridge; for though Martini is of no importance as a creative musician, his writings exhibit a spacious understanding, and it was he who taught the growing boy that musical form is not a kind of etiquette, but the very body of creation, without which the spirit cannot be made manifest. Let us remember with gratitude Martini, as well as Bach, when next we hear the great finale of the *Jupiter Symphony*. Mozart set to work in 1770 (the year of Beethoven's birth) upon his opera for Milan. The book was drawn from the *Mithridate* of Racine. Mozart was no longer the clever child who had put together the little musical patterns of his early operettas. He was turned fourteen and already knew the pangs of adolescence; but no boy of that age, not even a Mozart, can set Racine to music. The amount of Racine that survived the hacking of the play to suit the requirements of singers was very small; but the work was still on the heroic plane; and for work on that plane Mozart was not yet ready. Nevertheless, if we may believe Leopold, the opera was very successful, though what the Milanese most enjoyed was not Mozart, but his clever imitation of the usual operatic commonplaces. Actually, his next commissioned work, *Lucio Silla*, composed in 1772, contained more of the real Mozart, and failed to please. With its failure ended the Mozarts' Italian campaign, and they were compelled to fall back upon the drudgery of Salzburg under a new master. Italy saw them no more, and has never taken kindly to Mozart. As if by a portent, their return from Italy in 1771 coincided with the death of Archbishop Sigismund von Schrattenbach. His successor was Hieronymus von Colloredo, justly execrated by posterity. The servitude of German musicians, which Beethoven proudly disdained, resembled a little the servitude

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of Elizabethan players. Without a noble patron there was nothing but a precarious, vagabond life. The association of Haydn with the princely Esterhazys was honourable to both sides; but a Colloredo could dress Mozart in a menial's livery and send him to eat with the cooks and the lackeys. It was to the Salzburg of Colloredo that the Italian travellers returned. Not until 1775, at the age of nineteen, did Mozart begin to touch the fringe of success as an opera-writer. During the latter part of 1774 the court of Bavaria gave him an order for a light opera, and he began the music before visiting Munich in December. As the libretto, *La Finta Giardiniera* (The Pretended Garden-girl), had already been set to music, Mozart probably got from his predecessor some useful hints about the lay-out of a light opera. The story may be called absurd; but the music is difficult to assess, for the opera underwent some later revisions. A version was played in London several years ago and provided a most agreeable entertainment. A revived Glyndebourne should turn its attention to *La Finta Giardiniera*, which, though not of high importance, has definitely passed from the category of juvenilia and may be called Mozart's first real opera.

Several years elapsed before Mozart again appeared as a writer of opera. They were eventful years, which included vain hopes of an appointment at the court of Bavaria, and a second visit to Paris, where he found a battle raging between the partizans of Gluck and music-drama and the partizans of Piccinni and old-fashioned opera. Mozart observed the controversy, but remained wisely neutral. On this tour he was accompanied by his mother, and in Paris she died. Of actual success in Paris he had little and of possible success elsewhere he had no chance, for Leopold summoned him sternly back to Salzburg and servitude. Between his musical adventures came several love-affairs, mostly transient, for Mozart was as ready as Cherubino to cling to successive or simultaneous petticoats, the most tempestuous of them being agitated by the alluring

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form of the singer Aloysia Weber, who dazzled him, mocked him, and left him to find consolation and ultimate marriage with her duller and plainer sister Constanze.

II

Both in desire and in practice Mozart was feeling his way towards mature opera. In 1779 he carried further some incidental music he had written for the drama *Thamos, King of Egypt*, played by the company of Schikaneder, the actor, and he wrote portions of a German opera published posthumously with the title *Zaïde*—the name of its heroine. These have merely symptomatic interest, Schikaneder and *Thamos* hinting at *The Magic Flute* and *Zaïde* more than hinting at *Die Entführung*. Once more Bavaria gave him a chance by commissioning an Italian *opera seria* for 1781. The story of Idomeneus, King of Crete, who, returning from Troy, made a vow as rash as that of Jephthah, judge of Israel, is eminently suitable for operatic setting; but the librettist was incompetent and did not know how to get his characters on and off the stage. Moreover, the available singers had specific defects which limited grievously the composer's freedom of musical expression. *Idomeneo* is therefore not a stage success; but it has very great musical interest. The solos, the storm, the fine quartet, and, indeed, the general character of the work, may be claimed as the first clear indication of Mozart's stature as a writer of opera. Something could still be done with *Idomeneo*; but the something must be less drastic than the recent German version by Lothar Wallerstein and Richard Strauss. We do not want Mozart with twentieth-century improvements. That Mozart did not fulfil his intention of revising the work for different singers must be deplored. But we are not entitled to revise it for him, and so we have to do our best with an opera in which the tenor should be a bass and the *castrato* a tenor.

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Idomeneo was given at Munich early in 1781, the year in which Mozart was literally kicked out of the service of the Archbishop of Salzburg, and in which the dubious widow Weber, probably not guiltless of trading in her daughters, exacted from the susceptible composer, who had been lodging in her house, a written bond to marry Constanze. Mozart's dismissal in 1781 and his marriage in 1782 ended a servitude of a different kind, the long servitude to his father. Leopold was by nature an underling who submitted to the humiliations of the local tyrant and expected the same submissiveness from his son. He was not a bad father, but he was too much of a father, and killed the spirit of adventure in his all-too-docile son. Left to himself, Mozart would have learned to find his own way in the world. But Leopold wanted Wolfgang to be both a safe fixture at Salzburg and a touring prodigy in Europe—indeed, he appeared to believe that the whole duty of Wolfgang was to make Leopold's fortune. Colloredo, like a base Indian, threw a pearl away richer than all his tribe; but he gave the Mozarts no worse treatment than some incumbents used to give, and perhaps still give, their schoolmaster-organists or than some English borough councils gave to municipal bandsmen. A defence could be put up for Colloredo; a bad case could easily be made against Leopold. He never forgave Wolfgang's declaration of independence and refused with stiff resentment to be friendly with Constanze. We have no reason to suppose that Mozart's marriage was a failure. In the normal way of the world, a woman marries a man, not an institution; and the husband of Constanze was not the Mozart of our idolatry, but a weak, ingenuous, inconspicuous and unsuccessful little man, the father of her short-lived children, only two of whom survived to maturity. Indeed, apart from his music, Mozart had scarcely any vital existence. That music so graciously aristocratic should flow from such a humble vessel is one of the inexplicable caprices of nature. The foolish fanatics who assign celebrated works to earls and viscounts might find their

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uncritical rashness checked if they paused to consider, as they never do, the known facts of imaginative creation.

Vienna, where the final dismissal was given during the Archbishop's stay there, was at first inclined to be friendly to Mozart. The Emperor Joseph II desired to encourage German opera, and Mozart was commissioned to set a libretto, which, in the easy fashion of the times, the author had brazenly borrowed from another opera. The gorgeous East was in favour at the moment, and the subject of the new work was the escape of a captive Christian lady from the harem of a pasha—*Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (The Flight from the Seraglio). Mozart began his task in August 1782 and the work was produced in July 1783. *The Seraglio* is the earliest of Mozart's operas to be found in the regular operatic repertory. There are mistakes in the general lay-out; but the vitality of invention atones for all defects. Osmin is the first of Mozart's great musical characters, and Blondchen, the heroine's English maid, is own sister to Susanna, Zerlina, and Despina. Pedrillo sings an exquisite *romanza* which Sullivan must have remembered when he wrote 'Take a pair of sparkling eyes', and Constanze, the uninteresting captive, has two vocal concertos ('Traurigkeit' and 'Martern aller Arten') of high quality, though they are placed so close together that the effect of both is impaired and the singer left exhausted. Belmonte, the hero, is completely colourless; but the most serious defect of the opera is the absence of any music for the magnanimous Pasha —there being, originally, no singer for the part; and we are disconcerted by a character who is mute when he should sing and is vocal only when he speaks. Shallow persons often denounce opera as 'unnatural'. All art is unnatural—that is why it is art. Art is not an enclosed or imitated portion of nature, but nature transposed by the creative energy of man into forms limited by the material of expression. Within the limits of its own conventions every art lives a genuine natural life; but if it values that life it must not transgress those limits.

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Opera is a form of art in which characters express naturally their dramatic intensity in song. An operatic character without song is therefore a wanderer from another world. The songless Pasha of *The Seraglio*, being out of the musical picture, leaves the tragedy ineffective. What keeps the opera alive is the comedy, the irresistible vivacity which is one great quality of Mozart as an opera-writer; what we miss is the tenderness which is another of his gifts. Constanze is far from the high passion of Pamina, Blondchen has not the loving little heart of Zerlina. Mozart, at the age of twenty-six and after several serious efforts, had not achieved complete success as a composer of opera. But the miracle was about to happen.

III

In 1783, a year after the production of *The Seraglio*, Mozart encountered in Vienna the remarkable adventurer called Lorenzo da Ponte, baptized Jew, priest, poet, and amorist. Mozart was in search of a librettist; Da Ponte was in search of a composer. All they needed was a story; and this was provided when *La Folle Journée ou le Mariage de Figaro*, by Beaumarchais, was triumphantly produced in Paris on 27 April 1784. Mozart, who had been attracted by Paisiello's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1780), based on the earlier play of Beaumarchais, himself suggested the natural sequel, and the librettist produced an opera-book which closely follows the original play in its story of personal intrigues, and wisely rejects the political satire which gave the play its immediate vogue. The most astonishing fact about the opera is the sudden growth in musical stature it reveals. Between *The Seraglio* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* came the sketches for two light operas, *L'Oca del Cairo* and *Lo Sposo Deluso* in 1783, and the four delightful numbers of *Der Schauspieldirektor* early in 1786; but the first two are mere fragments, and the last is both too small in scale and too near *Figaro* in date to afford any useful evidence of artistic

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development. *The Seraglio* is a delightful but imperfect composition; *Le Nozze di Figaro* is in the highest class of musical achievements. Even more wonderful than the melodic perfection of the arias and the superb architecture of the ensembles is the artistic unity of the whole. *Figaro* has in the highest degree the outstanding quality of all great musical and literary creations, the quality that we may call creative motion. It 'goes on', without pausing to yearn or to expatiate, and in the full tide of motion attains complete musical and narrative expression. In other words, the movements really move. This quality of creative motion is the secret of the spell cast upon us by the masters of narration—by Homer, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Molière, Dickens, and Dumas. Compare a genuine play like Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with a literary play like Browning's *A Soul's Tragedy*. *Hamlet*, despite the apparently stationary solos, is always going on; *A Soul's Tragedy*, despite an apparently progressive story, revolves as uselessly as the wheels of a locomotive on frosty rails. Almost the only defect of *Figaro* is an over-complicated fourth act, and even this may be taken simply as a measure of the difference between a leisured and a hasty period. But any defect in that act would be redeemed by the great finale, which sheds a glow of tenderness over a story that promised little more than the success or failure of an unexalted intrigue. There is no need to doubt a happy ending that unites, musically, the simple affections of Figaro and Susanna and restores the romance of Rosina and Almaviva. The moved and gratified hearer carries from a performance of *Le Nozze di Figaro* not the strains of solicitation, but the tender echoes of 'Deh vieni non tardar' and 'Contessa, perdona'.

Vienna produced *Figaro* on 1 May 1786, over a century and a half ago; but Prague really put it on the map of music. Mozart paid a triumphant visit to the Bohemian capital early in 1787 and could report that even the street-boys whistled the airs from *Figaro*. When Don Giovanni's private band, playing snatches from popular operas, performs a few bars of 'Non

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più andrai', Leporello could justly remark, 'Questo poi la conosco pur troppo'. The jest would have had no meaning in ungrateful Vienna, which turned with fatigue from a masterpiece to welcome something more trivial. The emperor himself had deigned to remark in jest that there were 'too many notes' in *The Seraglio*; Vienna always found too many notes in any opera by Mozart.

The success of *Figaro* in Prague led to a commission for a new opera, and Mozart went naturally to Da Ponte for the book. The subject chosen was the profligate life of Don Juan and his destruction by the statue which he had impiously invited to supper. We need not trace the history of this cautionary tale, which, like the similar story of Faust's bargain with the devil, was a medieval invention devised to frighten the wicked into repentance. The curious fact is that both stories have lent themselves to memorable presentations of the eternal verities, and, we must add, to presentations in which the original values have become strangely distorted. Neither story is a tragedy in the right sense. All good Christians were meant to rejoice in the dreadful dismemberment of Faust by the devils and in the precipitation of Don Juan into hell by the marble hands of his victim. To this day the rough retributions in 'Punch and Judy' are a source of merriment even to repellently modern children. Faust and Don Juan are to be shuddered at and laughed at, not to be felt with and wept over. Art, however, being creative, re-animates the destructive myths of medieval piety. The infernal pictures of Bosch give us delight. Milton's Satan becomes majestic and almost admirable. Goethe's Faust not only cheats the devil because, like Peer Gynt, 'he had women behind him', but joins with the Spirit of Denial himself in a partnership of spiritual affirmation. Mozart's Don Giovanni ceases to be Il Dissoluto Punito (as the title calls him) and becomes so completely the hero of the piece that we delight in his polished profligacy and detest the almost venomous virtue of Donna Anna. But we must remember the old fable

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if we are to understand why Da Ponte and Mozart wrote *Don Giovanni* as a *dramma giocoso*, in which the happy ending is the damnation of its hero followed by a joyous vaudeville, sung by the survivors, to point the moral of his fate.

The story was familiar in many versions, from *El Burlador de Sevilla* of Tirso de Molina to *Le Festin de Pierre* of Molière; but we may be sure that Da Ponte did no more than borrow from other opera-books, two of which, at least, were familiar to him. The book for *Figaro* had been shaped by the play of Beaumarchais; there was no clear precedent in the book for *Don Giovanni*; and the opera has suffered, not (as we have shown) because it is inconsistent, but simply because it is untidy. In outline the plot is excellent; but in action the drama is impeded by characters who contribute nothing to the story. Structurally it is inferior to *Figaro*, which exploits every character. After her first tremendous indictment Donna Anna is merely useful as a voice in the great ensembles. Don Ottavio's solos are as irrelevant as Anna's, and if a popular tenor decided to replace them by 'M' appari' and 'Spirto gentil' the course of the opera would be unaltered. Don Ottavio's notion of heroism is to send some one to comfort his beloved while he sends for the police. The frail and faithful Elvira is very ineffectively used. All the life and interest of the opera are concentrated in the rascals, the peasants, and the statue. But what life and what interest! The music of the Don and Leporello, of Masetto and Zerlina, is a delight to the elderly connoisseur and to the young novice at his first opera; and with means incredibly simple, the music of the statue gives the hearer a thrill of dread which the elaborated noises of *Salome* and *Elektra* seek in vain to arouse. *Don Giovanni* was produced in Prague on 29 October 1787, with immense success. Vienna, as usual, was unfriendly, and not till May in the following year was the opera performed there. A few changes were made. The tenor could not sing 'Il mio tesoro', and was given instead the differently beautiful 'Dalla sua pace'. Elvira required

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another aria, and was placated with 'Mi tradi', which is lovely but undramatic. A new duet for Zerlina and Leporello was so bad a second thought that it is very rarely included in any performance. Worst of all, the finale was omitted, and this bad precedent of ending a comedy in the key of tragedy is now followed in most opera-houses. An attempt has been made to prove that Mozart meant the opera to end tragically with the infernal terrors of Don Giovanni's disappearance. The appropriate reply is that Mozart wrote a finale which brings back all the familiar characters and which, both musically and dramatically, points a moral and adorns a tale. We are not left snuffing the vapours of the pit.

By 1789 Vienna felt able to endure more notes from Mozart and asked for a comic opera. Once again, and for the last time, Da Ponte and Mozart collaborated, and the result was *Così fan tutte* (Thus do all Women!), the crown-jewel among light operas. Indeed, Mozart's last Italian opera may be called every Italian opera, for in the impudently absurd story, with its transparent conspiracies, disguises, and misunderstandings, and in the delicious music, with its mock-heroic treatment of comic situations, we have not only perfect art but perfect parody. The heroes and the heroines and the chambermaid and the conspirator are epitomes of the universal operatic population, and have lost their humanity to achieve new life as perfect puppets in a world of perfect unreality. As in *Petrushka*, the marionettes in *Così fan tutte* are like life and are yet not life. But some good people (Beethoven included) have been shocked by the supposed immorality of a quadrilateral complication which is as free from offence as a quadrilateral figure of Euclid. There have even been some who proposed to re-write the opera on the plane of edification, as if one could turn *The Rape of the Lock* into *The Idylls of the King* or *The Importance of being Earnest* into *The Silver Box*.

Così fan tutte was performed privately at the end of 1789 and publicly in January 1790, but achieved no great success,

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and, indeed, has never till recently won the response a jest so delicious deserves. The lightness and gaiety of the music conceal difficulties no less formidable than those of the weightier operas, and demand perfection of style in the performance. Fiordiligi must be as vocally tragic as Donna Anna, yet keep to the plane of high comedy. We intend no disrespect to some respectable performances at home and abroad when we say that *Così fan tutte* was never given in due perfection till the performance in 1934 at Glyndebourne, before an audience that seemed likely to be few, however fit. But the almost unknown opera conquered; and the new enthusiasm goes now to the extreme of asserting that *Così fan tutte* is Mozart's best opera. The claim is absurd. *Così fan tutte* is, indeed, almost flawless; but in its glittering perfection there is neither the magnitude nor the magnanimity of the greater, faultier works.

IV

Shortly after the production of *Così* in 1790, the Emperor Joseph II, from whom Mozart still hoped for recognition, died, and was succeeded by Leopold II, from whom he could hope for nothing. Thereafter the shadows closed in upon him. But there was a final burst of splendour. As we have seen, Mozart had written incidental music for Schikaneder's production of *Thamos*. Schikaneder, after a curiously varied life that might have been copied from the strolling players in *Wilhelm Meister*—if, indeed, that work did not copy something from him—had become the purveyor of popular entertainments at an unfashionable theatre on the outskirts of Vienna. Remembering Mozart, he commissioned a comic opera that should have the kind of scenic effects and theatrical magic that we associate with the Christmas pantomimes. In Schikaneder's borrowed story there was an injured queen of supernatural power, whose daughter, stolen by a wicked magician, was to be rescued by a young prince armed with a talisman, in the form

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of a magic flute, given him by the queen. But before the collaborators in the new pantomime had got very far, their plot was anticipated by a rival, who hastily produced an entertainment in which a prince and his servant accomplished the rescue of a distressed maiden by the aid of a magic zither and a magic bassoon. The undismayed and economical Schikaneder kept what was written and, calling to his help one Ludwig Giesecke from his troupe of actors, made a conversion as surprising as that which, a century ago, turned a disagreeable Samuel Pickwick into a figure of universal benevolence. The story was completely changed. The injured queen became the embodiment of evil, and the wicked magician became the magnanimous high priest of a Masonic Utopia, sheltering the threatened child of an evil mother till a worthy and attested hero should pass through fire and water for her sake. Schikaneder's story was intended to exploit the character of Papageno, played by himself: Giesecke's story subordinates both Papageno the clown and Tamino the prince to the overpowering figure of Sarastro —that is, if Giesecke were the author, for his name was never mentioned in connexion with *The Magic Flute* till many years later. Giesecke was a remarkable person, who, said to be the original of Wilhelm Meister himself, passed from the study to the stage and thence to science, achieved a professorship in Dublin and a portrait by Raeburn, and became both a knight and a figure in European learning. His claim to the authorship of the book for *The Magic Flute* was made quite casually in conversation at a time when he was an eminent man with nothing to gain from a confessed association with Schikaneder's shabby enterprises. Whatever Giesecke's part in *The Magic Flute*, the clear fact is that the story begins in one way and ends in another; and those who have failed to understand why the Queen of Night should have chosen Tamino to be the instrument of her own destruction may be assured that the fault is not theirs.

But here a strictly chronological narrative must be interrupted. *The Magic Flute* was begun in the spring of 1791. In

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August Mozart's friends in Prague asked him to provide a serious opera to celebrate the coronation of Leopold II as King of Bohemia in September. The libretto provided was a version of *La Clemenza di Tito* by Metastasio, a classic and frigid story. But Mozart was fully occupied with *The Magic Flute*, which he wrote from his heart; and to *La Clemenza*, suddenly demanded with ill-timed urgency, he could give only the teased fragments of his failing energy. Those who have been compelled to interrupt a labour of love by some unwelcome task will understand Mozart's distraction. He did what he could. *La Clemenza di Tito* was duly written and performed, and it failed. It is still a failure; but it is a simple, honest failure, not an abject failure nor a pretentious failure. Certain numbers, especially 'Non più di fiore', live in the concert room; but the whole lacks the creative motion of Mozart's inspired compositions. Those who can accept a great man's second best for the sake of his best will never disdain *La Clemenza*, which, indeed, was the first of Mozart's operas to be performed in England. We should be foolish not to read or see *Timon of Athens* because it is inferior to *King Lear*.

Despite the failure of *La Clemenza*, Mozart, on his return to Vienna, was able to compose some of the best parts of *The Magic Flute*, including the magnificent overture. From a clown's pantomime with incidental lovers, *The Magic Flute* became a serious, indeed, a religious drama, humanized, in Shakespearian fashion, by the broad life of the comic relief. Papageno and his Papagena represent the instinct of humanity that desires no more than immediate gratification; Tamino and Pamina represent the instinct of humanity that aspires to noble attainment even at the cost of toil and suffering; Sarastro represents the wisdom that animates the will to attain. Yet all these high matters take the form not of moral exhortation but of artistic creation. Mozart, like Shakespeare, neither approves nor condemns, but presents for our reception the truth that is beauty. Monostatos, like Caliban, is punished, but permitted;

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Tamino and Pamina, like Ferdinand and Miranda, have a bitter testing and are united by faith, love, and courage; Sarastro, like Prospero, controls and is controlled. The great design is clear, and its expression, in the best-loved numbers of the work, is never lost on the hearer who aspires to know Mozart worthily. Some of the characters have passed into popular mythology and the story triumphs over its own lovable absurdities. Only the dull persons who cannot look at a work of art till it is stuck about with labels of identification will take *The Magic Flute* as a mere document in Freemasonry. Further, the critics who condemn the absence of a 'real' (i.e. a sexual) love-scene between Tamino and Pamina have missed the whole point of a work which proclaims the beauty of a love that transcends the urgency of sex. The love of Papageno and Papagena is physical; the love of Tamino and Pamina is metaphysical. And yet, by a felicitous chance, if chance it be and not pure inspiration, some of the most delightful moments in the opera are the duets of Papageno and Pamina—the physical and the metaphysical meeting, as in life they must, on the plane of understanding. The love that means the darkness and oblivion of death is hymned with sufficient fervour in *Tristan und Isolde*; *The Magic Flute* sings the love that is light and life.

That there are some minor failures in *The Magic Flute* cannot be denied; but we must not be bullied into taking its greatest merit as its greatest defect. We have learned to abjure the nineteenth-century doctrine that a work of art is good if it is moral; we must as firmly abjure the twentieth-century doctrine that a work of art is bad if it is moral. The Spenserian virtue of *The Magic Flute* has naturally incited the noisy midges of criticism to assert its inferiority to the amoral *Così fan tutte*. We listen politely, and pass on. *The Magic Flute* is the greatest of operas. It calls out our deepest affection and our highest admiration. No other opera lies so near to the heart of the hearer who knows it well. In the unchallengeable judgement of recorded history it is written that in all places and in all times

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man is at his greatest when he strives for noble achievement and at his lowest when he sinks with ignoble content into the sensual sty.

> What is a man
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more;
> Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and godlike reason
> To fust in us unused.

That, in its lovable and exquisite music, is the message of *The Magic Flute*.

The work, produced on 30 September 1791, in a shabby, unfashionable theatre, was a great success, and the splendour of that achievement irradiated the last hours of a dying man. Mozart's incessant and innocent labours had brought him no material success and had not spared him the degradations of poverty. Not yet thirty-six, he was physically and mentally worn out, and no measures of rest or restoration could have saved him. To speculate upon what he might have done is useless. It is never safe to judge an artist by the works he did not live to write; and in any case the bequest of Mozart to the world is equal in value and completeness to the legacies of his only peers, Bach and Beethoven, whose lives were longer. The widow, left in penury, was urged to waste no money on his funeral, and the body of a supremely great artist was huddled into a common grave on 6 December, the day after his death. He whose last great utterance was the greeting to the sun in *The Magic Flute* was interred without a mourner on a wild winter day, and the place of his sepulture remains unknown. Ungrateful Vienna, that grudged him bread, did not even give him a stone.

The work of Mozart has now attained a high renown that is beyond any danger, but the excesses of those fanatical modern partizans who, babbling like our Highgate seer of 'summject' and 'ommject', appear to identify Beethoven with the first and

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Mozart with the second. Those who can find 'summject' or 'ommject' in *Fidelio* or in *Figaro* are welcome to their ingenuity. Those who wish to base their opinions upon something more substantial than the cackle of cocktail parties will find a rich variety of historical, biographical, and critical information in volumes issued during the last few years. But of course the only way to know the operas of any composer is to read the scores and to hear them performed. The five best operas of Mozart are readily accessible in popular editions; the others are a little harder to come by—a score of *Idomeneo* in the original Italian being now almost unobtainable. Performances of the more popular works, either in the original languages or in English, have been fairly frequent here. The record of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells is specially honourable. Many English lovers of Mozart were driven abroad to find performances worthy of the master, especially to Salzburg, which despised and rejected Mozart living and piously profited by Mozart dead. But between the wars a new chapter in the history of Mozart's operas was written. At Glyndebourne, near Lewes, in the heart of Sussex, a small opera-house was built in which, in successive years, the five chief operas were presented with the perfection of detail that commercial theatres cannot afford and the intimacy of performance that large theatres cannot attain. And now the music-lover can hear the four greatest at home. A beginning was made with gramophone records of the great ensembles in *Figaro* as given at Glyndebourne. Later the solo numbers were recorded, and in this rather confusing fashion the whole work was presented, without the *recitativo secco*. *Così fan tutte* and *Don Giovanni* were directly recorded with the recitatives. For *The Magic Flute* the gramophone company turned from Glyndebourne to Berlin and presented the whole of the music with a 'star cast' under the direction of Sir Thomas Beecham. The spoken dialogue was not included; but the books of words accompanying the albums give the original texts with translations, as well as recitatives and dia-

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logue. The music-lover has, therefore, these four great operas presented as perfectly as anything can be in this imperfect world. We should cling to them as relics of a vanished civilization.

The temptation to dwell upon the inexhaustible beauty of these lovely examples of a lovely art must be resisted. Let us be content to say that the operas of Mozart are a joy to youth and a treasure to maturity; and that as the days darken towards the journey's end, and the wise begin to cast away the things that have served their turn, these remain to blend into the sunset hour and music at the close.

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§ vi

Henry Irving

1838–1905 = 67

I

HENRY IRVING was a great actor. That is a simple proposition; but emphasis must be laid on the epithet. Unless it is understood that Irving was great there can be no comprehension of his life and art. He may have had this or that defect, he may have played this part well and that part ill; but he was always great. Further, he was unique. He resembled no other person on the stage or off. Few people now living can remember Irving, and of these, the younger, who saw him only in the season of 1905 at Drury Lane, must be told that they were seeing, not, indeed, a decaying actor, but a dying man. One other person, also dead, and now fading into a memory of the elderly, belonged to something like the same order of being. Those who saw Shalyapin as Boris Godunov, as Ivan the Terrible, and as Dositheus said that he reminded them of Irving. There was not the least actual resemblance, but each possessed, in his own way, the abnormal quality called greatness, which is a purely personal emanation, inimitable and inexplicable.

Greatness has long been outmoded in all the creative activities—has, indeed, been denounced as intolerable—and is evidently beyond the understanding of those who lead the public dance in the press or on the platform. That this is not supposition, but plain fact, can be proved by one sufficient example. The statesman whom all politicians of all parties refused to place in high office was the statesman whom all politicians of all parties appealed to as the one man who could

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save the country. And he did it. Then the grateful country basely and shamefully cast him out. Why was he despised and rejected? Because he had committed the crime of being a great man. This is the day of the Little Man, who, indeed, has become a national legendary figure. Those of us who are happy enough to remember the last three decades of the nineteenth century lived in an air of greatness. I was not old enough to understand the nature of greatness, but as a child I gathered from the talk of my elders a sense of public calamity caused by the death of George Eliot, of Carlyle, of Disraeli, of Darwin, of Wagner, of Victor Hugo, and of Liszt. As a schoolboy I saw in Whitehall the great Jubilee procession of 1887, and thought the celebration of 1897 a pale, attenuated phantom of the original. By 1888, when Matthew Arnold died, I took notice for myself, though knowledge of his work had not yet become a reality, as very soon it did. The death of Browning in 1889 meant the passing of a famous, but then forbidding figure. The death of Newman in 1890 seemed like a personal loss, for I had read the *Apologia*, and was an ardent disciple, though never a member of his chosen Church. But the climax came in 1892 with the death of Tennyson. I was nearly twenty, and under the spell of his exquisite cadences. I can still recall the autumn evening when I heard the news of his death. It seemed as if poetry itself had passed away.

Henry Irving was part of the greatness of this great period. Just as Gladstone was the great man of politics, and W.G. the great man of cricket, so Irving was the great man of the theatre. If any distinguished visitor came to this country, he might receive two high honours: he might be received at Court and he might be received at the Lyceum. I lay stress on this fact of greatness, for, as no actor of such commanding personality has appeared since, there is no standard by which he can be measured, and he is not readily comprehensible by those who never felt the potency of his art. The coming of the film has changed the whole *tempo* of drama. We are now under the

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tyranny of the thing seen, and we demand speed. So the acting that filled the old spacious days has become impossible. We have only time for patter. The elaborated art of Irving has vanished, never to return, not even as an influence. This was apparent in the centenary articles, most of which were written by those who got up their matter at second hand, had no notion of his magnitude, blamed him for faults he never committed and accused him of an indifference he had never shown. I regret I have not the exact reference, but I remember one article which dwelt complacently on the fact that we had now passed the days when it was possible for an actor to become famous by ranting about the stage, listening to the sound of imaginary bells. It would be difficult to write anything more completely fatuous.

II

Irving was no infant Roscius. He did not burst upon the town with the vogue of notoriety. His art was of the kind that matures with the accumulation of years. He slowly built himself into a stage personality by long and patient work in the provinces. A theatrical career was always his ambition. At school his recitations attracted attention. When he became a clerk he took lessons in elocution and fencing, and at the age of eighteen transferred his practice to the stage itself, appearing at Sunderland in 1856 as Orleans in *Richelieu*, speaking the appropriate first words of the play,

Here's to our enterprise!

The Sunderland critic who advised him to take the first boat back to London was probably quite justified, for the young Henry Irving was almost certainly crudely incompetent. But the Sunderland critic, and more important later critics, knew nothing of their man. Irving was a bad actor, and he knew that quite well. He was in the theatre to learn how to become a better actor. His appearance on the stage was merely part of his self-imposed novitiate. From the beginning, he not only

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wanted to be an actor, he wanted to be the greatest actor of the time, the ruler of the stage, the master of theatrical craft who should play famous parts better than they had ever been played before. Just as the young Disraeli (of whom he reminds us) foresaw himself as Prime Minister when he was still a solicitor's clerk, so the young Irving foresaw the Lyceum when he first trod the boards at Sunderland. He was conscious of no mission to reform the drama of his day, bad as it was; he was moved solely by his desire to master the art of acting.

Irving had some striking natural gifts and some equally striking defects. To the end of his life people said that he had a bad voice. But a 'bad voice' may mean anything or nothing. Many actors have bad voices and many actresses even worse. The major defect of Irving's voice was its poor tone quality. Good teaching can improve some defects of the voice, but it cannot change tone quality. It can teach a tenor how to make the best use of his voice, but it cannot give him the tone quality of Caruso. Irving had also a curiously bad walk, a kind of halting limp—two steps and a stop—which in some parts he could discard, and in some, notably in *Becket*, he could improve into a gait of majesty. I feel almost sure that his stage walk was deliberately assumed as being appropriate to the theatre of his youth. If so, it was a very unfortunate choice. However, he had many qualities in his favour—a tall slender figure which kept its suppleness to the end, beautiful hands with which he could make wonderful play, a magnificent head with naturally flowing black hair, a great domed forehead with heavy eyebrows that seemed almost capable of speech, deep set eyes alive with expression, and an unforgettable profile of the high patrician kind. He seemed to belong to no recognizable racial type. It is possible that in his early manhood he was a gawky, unattractive youth, oddly put together; but as he matured he became handsome, and in later life he was a wonderfully impressive figure, on the stage and off. His power of facial expression, early noticed, was so complete

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that in the death scene of Louis XI he could gradually empty his face of all semblance of life, and become ghastly, frightening, like one not only dead, but long dead. So determined was he to perfect a unique stage personality, that he turned his poor voice into a subtly expressive instrument, conquering the English vowels and consonants, and delivering them with perfect and almost unnatural purity. Bernard Shaw, the merciless critic of Irving's apparent neglect of modern drama, never failed to do justice to the purity of his speech. What he chose to do with his voice dramatically is another matter, not here arising. But he had to leave orotund parts alone, as beyond his capacity. I never saw him as Othello (he was certainly better as Iago), but I can guess that, however interesting he may have been, he could never have given Othello's speeches their almost operatic quality. He lacked, too, the physical appeal necessary in a romantic stage-lover. Beyond these gifts and defects he possessed a quality that defies analysis. Like Beethoven, Paganini and Liszt he belonged to the daemonic race of men who seem to have a personal aura and bring with them an atmosphere that is not quite that of this world. Though in his years of success a most kindly, sociable man, fond of listening to talk that turned night into day, Irving withheld something of himself from every one. There was not one of his many friends, not even his great-hearted, faithful manager, Bram Stoker, who penetrated the invisible wall that surrounded him. And perhaps the reason is that he never belonged to the world; he belonged to the theatre, and was never really out of it. Into a life so completely dominated by a single interest, normal people cannot enter. To the theatre, and the theatre alone, he gave his heart; and so to some he appeared heartless.

One example of the unshakeable determination with which Irving endured his long apprenticeship was a terrible experience during an engagement in Dublin in 1860. Unknown to himself, he was given the parts of a popular Dublin character, who had taken himself, or had been taken, out of the theatre

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because of acute disagreement with the manager. The Dublin theatrical crowd, as barbarous as the Italian theatrical crowd, resented the removal of their favourite and conspired to drive out his supplanter; so every appearance of Irving was greeted with catcalls, howls, shrieks and hisses. But he never faltered. He went through his business as if he were playing to a sympathetic house; and night after night made up for his parts knowing perfectly well what awaited him in the theatre. He was the most sensitive as well as the most generous of men; but he had the gift that often goes with great sensitiveness, indomitable courage. If to endure this torment was part of the price to be paid for success, he would beat his foes by sheer tenacity. And he did. He was not shocked by the experience, he was steeled. It is interesting to recall that it was Dublin which, some years later, first accorded him academic honours and a sort of public 'triumph'.

III

In general, Irving's early years as an actor were not adventurous. He passed from company to company in many towns (including London), never achieving any outstanding success or attracting special attention. He belonged to the ill-paid crowd of stock actors, playing everything and anything allotted to him. It is said that he played over five hundred different parts, including Hamlet at Manchester, quite successfully. But his ambition never slumbered, and he dared sometimes, at the risk of heavy loss, to give theatrical readings or recitals, which gave fuller opportunities for the display of his gifts. As early as 1859 he gave a reading of *The Lady of Lyons* at Crosby Hall (which old Londoners remember in the City itself), and one notice survives which praised the performance highly, declaring that the play was 'poetically read by a most accomplished elocutionist, who gave us not only words, but that finer indefinite something which proves incontestably and instantaneously that the fire of genius is present in the artist'.

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Apparently the first person to recognize Irving's unusual power was Dion Boucicault, the author of excellent melodramas and a man of keen theatrical sense. Several people claimed to have discovered Irving, but Boucicault certainly made his discovery effective. In 1866, when Irving was out of a job and very anxious to find one, Boucicault offered him an engagement in Manchester to play the leading part in a new piece, based on Dickens's short story *Hunted Down*. Irving's character was the villain Rawdon Scudamore (Julius Slinkton in the original, a figure suggested by the career of the poisoner Wainewright). Irving's elaborately polished delineation of cold and deadly villainly so impressed Boucicault that he asked Charles Reade for an independent judgement, and they both agreed that, in spite of some marked mannerisms, Irving was the finest tragedian of the last fifty years. This was a turning-point in Irving's fortunes. For a triumphant success he had still to wait a few years longer; but he was no longer a nobody —there was a demand for his services.

The name of Miss Ruth Herbert is now forgotten. She was once a celebrated Pre-Raphaelite beauty, and, having a high sense of dramatic art, took the St James's Theatre in 1866 for a theatrical season in which plays and players should be of the best quality. The favourable opinion of Irving formed by Boucicault and Reade was shared by Tom Taylor, another dramatist of importance in his day, and through him Irving was engaged for the St James's venture. It was proposed to begin with *Hunted Down*, and Boucicault is said to have stipulated that Irving should play Scudamore. However, *Hunted Down* could not be got ready in time, and the season began with Mrs Cowley's once popular comedy *The Belle's Stratagem*, in which Irving played Doricourt. He felt that he had failed, and was pleasantly surprised to find that the audience received him with enthusiasm. In later years Irving twice revived the play at the Lyceum, the last time with Ellen Terry as Letitia Hardy. But at the St James's his greatest success was gained in

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Hunted Down, in which it was noticed that the effect of his facial expression in depicting character was astonishing. During this season at the St James's Irving played many parts which need not here be named.

Theatrical London at this period was in a state of general insecurity, shabbiness and decay. The fashionable part of society ignored it as unworthy of their notice. Pinero's play *Trelawney of the Wells* gives a faithful and first-hand picture of the nature and status of the players in the sixties. Life was precarious, for no engagements lasted long, and the favourite of to-day was not always remembered to-morrow. Miss Herbert went away on tour, and at the end of 1867 Irving joined the company collected by Alfred Wigan at the long vanished Queen's Theatre in Long Acre—a building of many vicissitudes. Here he played for the first time with Ellen Terry in parts which could have suited neither—the title roles in *Katherine and Petruchio*, Garrick's shortened version of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Of Irving's performances here little need be said except that they included a powerful impersonation of Bill Sikes. After other engagements of no importance he was chosen by John Hollingshead, long known as manager of the Gaiety Theatre, to play Mr Chenevix in H. J. Byron's *Uncle Dick's Darling*, a part which he or the author had modelled on Mr Dombey. Dickens, who saw the play, enjoyed it greatly and prophesied a great future for Irving. We are getting warm, as children say in their game. In 1870 he left the Gaiety for the Vaudeville to take a part called Digby Grant in a simple unpretentious piece by a young playwright named James Albery. *Two Roses*, as the comedy was named, was hardly strong enough to endure; but it was given life by Irving's masterly performance of Digby Grant, a sort of Mr Dorrit, a character which the actor, by the elaboration of detail, over which he had grown to have sure command, made a real stage creation, that is, something far beyond the elementary notion of the part contained in the script. This quality of Irving's defies

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definition. In every part he played there was the part in full, and there was always something above and beyond the part; to this point I shall return; but it is worth notice that even as manager he seemed to exercise a curious magnetic power, for never was man more devotedly served by his associates, from Ellen Terry herself down to the humblest stage carpenter.

IV

Two Roses ran for nearly a year, and left Irving the most prominent actor on the English stage. And then at last came tremendous and permanent success. Colonel Hezekiah Bateman and his wife, of the United States, had long exploited the precocious dramatic gifts of their two daughters, Kate and Ellen, who had first appeared when Kate was nine, under the appropriate management of Barnum. The Colonel thought the time had come to give another daughter, Isabel, a chance. He wanted a theatre and a leading man. At the corner of Wellington Street and the Strand was a vacant, derelict theatre called the Lyceum. The Colonel took it. At the Vaudeville Henry Irving had proved to be the best actor of the day. The Colonel engaged him. In theatrical Bohemia there was a man named Leopold Lewis, who had made a version of *Le Juif Polonais* by Erckmann-Chatrian which he called *The Bells* and which he believed Irving would play wonderfully. The Colonel would not take it. Instead, he produced in September 1871 an insipid piece called *Fanchette*, based on a story by George Sand. It failed. In October the saddened Colonel tried a version of *Pickwick*, with Irving as Jingle. This, though a personal triumph for Irving as an actor of comedy, was a failure as a production, and the unhappy Colonel, seeing nothing but ruin before him, proposed to abandon his adventure and retreat to America. Then Irving pressed him to put on *The Bells*; but Bateman proved very obstinately hostile. Stung by two failures, he believed that *The Bells* would be the third and worst. The man

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who had believed that *Fanchette* would succeed was sure that *The Bells* would fail. It was not the kind of play, he argued, that could ever succeed. Besides, had not Burnand's version, called *Paul Zegers*, already been tried and proved a failure? Irving got the old man in a corner—it was either *The Bells* or America. So at last, with dismal forebodings, the Colonel gave way; but he was obstinate to the end, for he did his worst with the mounting and production. So on 25 November 1871 a curious audience assembled at the Lyceum to witness Bateman's third and last failure. What happened that night had not happened on the English stage since 26 January 1814, when Edmund Kean electrified an indifferent audience at Drury Lane by his performance of Shylock. Henry Irving woke next day to find himself famous. More surprising, Hezekiah Bateman woke next day to find himself successful.

The story of *The Bells* is so well-known that it need not be told here, nor need we enter into the controversy between Irving and Coquelin about the way to present the guilty figure who dominates the play. But this we can admit, that Irving's Mathias is a highly improbable Alsatian village innkeeper. He is an intensely imaginative being organized to the height of suffering. Ever-present terror and the dread of discovery have woven themselves through many years into the very texture of his being. He can never forget his crime. In short, he is a tragic figure like Macbeth, not a stolid commonplace criminal, as Coquelin more credibly made him. But the artistic question arises, do we want to see on the stage a sturdy peasant who thinks no more about killing and robbing a Jew than he would think about killing a pig, who drinks too much wine one night, dreams of his crime, and dies of apoplexy, or do we want to see an imaginative creature, driven to crime by the threat of ruin, and suffering in conscience till he can endure no more? In other words, is Coquelin's Mathias worth making a play about? I say No. As I remarked earlier, Irving brought into his part something above and beyond the part, and I can

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illustrate this by one effect the performance had on me when I first saw it at the age of nineteen. I was already an eager playgoer and had seen Irving in other parts. I knew nothing at all about the story (though I possessed an unread copy of an earlier version), but I was deeply impressed at once by the 'preparation', the opening scene at the inn—the wild winter storm screaming more loudly each time the door opened to admit the habitual cronies who assembled there, and who recalled in snatches of talk the 'Polish Jew's winter' long ago, when that strange visitant, with his broad belt heavily laden with gold, had driven through the snow in his sleigh with its jingling bells to take refreshment before going on to the town, and how, though sleigh and horse were found next day, no trace of the Jew had ever been discovered. Mathias, rich, respected, owner of the inn and burgomaster of the commune, is not present—he is away in the town on business, but is expected at any moment. A fiercer gust of wind and the crashing of glass herald the arrival of Mathias, storm-beaten and snow-covered, but lavish with large and genial gestures of greeting to his wife and daughter and his old friends. Yes, 'large and genial gestures'; yet why did some odd instinct tell me, 'This is a haunted man'? There was no precise conviction that this was the perpetrator of the murder which had been the theme of conversation; indeed, so far, there was no certainty that a murder had been in fact committed—all that was known was that the Jew and his gold had vanished and left no trace, though perhaps the neighbouring lime-kilns could have revealed something to a searcher. Nevertheless I had a sure sense that with Mathias there entered also a black shadow from which he could never escape. I felt a curious thrill at the heart. How Irving conveyed that effect at that moment defies explanation—other than the technical explanation that this entry was exactly what the 'preparation' had led up to. But it was the man, not the situation, that gave me the thrill, as it was the man, not the situation, that made the play. There are,

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indeed, no situations, for the play is almost a monologue, in which the actor can exert all his personal magic. That personal magic raised a crude melodrama to a tragedy. And so no one, however skilled, can play an Irving part, just as no string player, however earnest and capable, can produce the tone of Kreisler or Casals. So far from there being any 'ranting about the stage', there was dreadful silence or broken speech while Mathias, in his dream, reveals to the judge, in words extorted by the mesmerist, the details of the crime. The effect was overwhelming.

V

The Bells ran from November 1871 to May 1872. As it is a short play it was followed at first by the Jingle scenes from *Pickwick* and later by Kenney's farce *Raising the Wind*, in which Irving played Jeremy Diddler with great success. An excellent book on Irving by Charles Hiatt (1899) thus refers to this apposition of highly contrasted parts: 'One is tempted to describe this as a feat without parallel in the annals of any other living actor until one recalls the fact that Mr Beerbohm Tree has frequently played Falstaff and Gringoire in *The Ballad-Monger* at the same performance.' That is an astonishing sentence. The author appears to think Tree's Falstaff comparable to Irving's Mathias as a feat of acting. But in the true sense of the word Tree never acted Falstaff at any time. What he did was to get himself made up as an immense fat man and to deliver Falstaff's words with a thickened voice. Of any creation of Falstaff's character there was no trace. When he played Gringoire he got out of his Falstaff make-up and appeared as a starveling. This difference between the fat and the lean was not a feat of acting, it was a feat of make-up. But there are many playgoers who appear to believe that elaborate make-up is a triumph of acting. They are the kind of people who used to complain that Irving was always Irving. Did they expect him to change characters with Coquelin or Toole? Of

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course Irving was always Irving, as Beethoven is always Beethoven. Irving's method of acting—only possible to a man of theatrical genius—was to study a character till it had passed into his being, till he had, for stage purposes, become that character. Thus, though he presented the character in clear and unmistakable outline, he filled it with elaborate detail natural to the person represented. Irving never used detail for its own sake, and he deliberately avoided making points. It is probable that the more intelligent of his adverse critics were disturbed by this absence of point-making. If they had seen some other actor, such as Barry Sullivan, who was lavish in point-making, play a part which Irving afterwards presented, they felt that he had let certain passages go for nothing. But Irving was not on the stage to make points, he was there to present character. A great actor has a dual personality. There is the creative artist who makes the character come alive, and there is the technical artist who provides the means for that creative act. Each must be unceasingly watchful of the other. There is nothing strange in that. It is what happens when a great violinist or pianist is playing a concerto. The creative artist interprets the music; the technical artist provides the means of interpretation. Each must be unceasingly watchful of the other, and, in fact, the two must be one. In time, the technique of a familiar piece becomes mechanical, that is, it ceases to be a psychological memory and becomes a muscular memory. But woe to the player who is tempted by familiarity to forget technique! He has a lapse of memory, and if he is not skilful enough to conceal his slip, he breaks down. I saw *The Bells* whenever it was revived, not only because I was thrilled by it, but because I enjoyed watching all the details with which the character was presented. They never varied. Precisely at the same moment each night there would be precisely the same effect—a slight movement of the expressive hands or the expressive eyes, and the effect was made. So I have never been interested in any discussion of Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*. What is necessary for the actor is a

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perfect fusion of creative power with controlling power. Whether the actor is so moved by his part as to shed real tears is totally unimportant to the audience, unless some loss of technical control is implied. Whether the actor 'feels' his part is really a question impossible to discuss, because the word 'feeling' is one of those dangerous abstractions which may have a thousand degrees of significance. The amateur actor tries to feel his part because he has no technique; the skilled professional feels his part technically. Ernest Van Dyck, the tenor, relates that, during the love-duet in *Die Walküre*, the Sieglinde, a famous singer with whom he had not rehearsed, threw herself passionately into his arms and whispered, 'I cut twenty-five bars here and go on at so-and-so.' That Irving did not, in any deep sense, 'feel' his part of Mathias is proved by the fact that he played it during a run of one hundred and fifty-two performances; and no member of the audience, however enthralled by the spectacle of suffering, felt it so deeply as to need first aid! True, Irving nearly killed himself when he played the part during his last tour; but his collapse was due to the difference between 1871 and 1905. And thus we are introduced to a person usually ignored in aesthetic discussions, namely, the physical man. An actor must be a strong, healthy man to endure the strain of a long and arduous part, just as a violinist must be a strong, healthy person to endure the strain of a long and complicated concerto. A tenor with a weak heart should not attempt to sing Siegfried or Otello, however fine his voice and technique. I don't think we need discuss anything Irving may have said about the theory of acting in any of his addresses, because he did not write them himself, though they represented what he believed he thought. He was simply an actor, and unless he could identify himself with a character he could not play it. In other words, he had to feel his part before, and not during, the performance. In my recollection his chief failure was in *Coriolanus*; and he failed because he could not identify himself with a character like

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Caius Marcius, and could not, like his great predecessors, carry off the part by sheer oratory. So immemorable was his performance that one almost forgets that it ever took place, even though Ellen Terry was Volumnia—a part entirely out of her range.

That Irving's success in *The Bells* was no feat of the moment was abundantly proved in Bateman's second production (1872), a play called *Charles I* by a lamentably prolific contemporary writer, William Gorman Wills. The play is incredibly bad, false as history and contemptible as verse. But here, as in *The Bells*, Irving lifted his character out of its context and gave a performance of matchless grace, dignity and authority—so masterly that one could hardly imagine such a Charles being defeated and overthrown by such a Cromwell and Ireton. The Queen was played by Isabel Bateman, but in later revivals Ellen Terry presented the character with moving dignity. Irving rightly kept the play in his repertory, for it was one of his great successes. The final parting of the King and Queen, which might have degenerated into maudlin sentimentalism, was kept at a height of tragic dignity that deeply affected all who saw it.

In 1873 Bateman again resorted to Wills, who, on this occasion, produced *The Fate of Eugene Aram*, a version of the story that departed widely from the sordid facts of the case. To the virtual creator of Mathias the part of this second self-tortured murderer offered no difficulty, and, as one critic acidly said, the success opened to him the entire Newgate Calendar. But apparently the success was real, as the play ran for six months. It was revived later, but never took a place in the repertory. So far, Bateman had presented his new tragedian in parts which offered no challenge of comparison; but late in 1873 he resolved to revive *Richelieu*; and here Irving had to stand comparison with Macready, who had produced it in 1839, and with others who had played it after. The critical verdicts differed widely, but the revival ran for nearly six

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months. I think that much of the adverse criticism arose from misunderstanding. The part had been in the repertory of Barry Sullivan (who lived till 1891), an actor of fine figure and sonorous voice, though, oddly enough, he was much more successful in the provinces and America than in London. Those who had seen Sullivan and the few who could remember Macready went to the Lyceum expecting something that Irving had no power of giving them at any time, namely, robustness. Irving's strength lay, not in power of oratory, but in the elaborate revelation of character. I saw him as Richelieu in one of the later revivals, and found the performance deeply impressive as a study in the old age of a great man, who could still on occasion flash with the unextinguished fire, as he did notably in the 'curse of Rome' speech. Of its greatness as an impersonation there was no doubt. Indeed, I use it as a test, and ask of any actor, Could this man play Richelieu? I have seen no one who could touch the part.

VI

Richelieu concluded its first run early in 1874. A play of no importance followed. It was then announced that, after a tour in the provinces, the company would return in the autumn and play in a performance of *Hamlet*. Here came, as Irving knew well, the real turning point in his career. If he failed, there was an end to his dream of a triumphant future. Could he succeed? Voice and gait were dead against him. At no time was Irving the glass of fashion and the mould of form. No actor could exhibit more moving tenderness, no actor was less qualified to play the lover, even so little a lover as Hamlet is. Most elderly playgoers have seen at least a score of Hamlets, native or foreign, male or female. Have any of them been *great* Hamlets? I answer for myself and say, No. We have liked some for this quality and some for that; but of none can we say that he (or she) presented all the qualities of an immensely long and varied

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part. For Hamlet is many persons, not one person, like Othello. To be all the Hamlets is perhaps beyond the power of any actor. Macbeth, though difficult, is simpler. The actor who attempts to play Macbeth finds that he has to be Richard II and Richard III at the same time. But Hamlet is more complex and contradictory than even that. According to Pepys, Betterton was the best of Hamlets, and the old prompter Downes declared that 'Mr Betterton took every part of his Hamlet from Sir William Davenant, who had seen Mr Taylor, who was taught by Mr Shakespeare himself'. Unfortunately Mr Betterton did not pass on the tradition, and so every man must be his own Hamlet. I think it may be said that Irving gave far more of Hamlet than any of his successors have been able to give. The part suited his curiously magnetic personality and his power of exposing the inmost thoughts of a character. He made no points and sought for no effects. When the famous passage comes,

> Look here upon this picture and on this,
> The counterfeit presentment of two brothers,

there were no pictures, except those that Hamlet paints in his description. How many Hamlets have we seen with real pictures varying from miniatures to full lengths on the wall like those in *Ruddigore*! The main note of Irving's performance was sheer intensity—intensity of thought and intensity of feeling. It was a long and terrible *crescendo*. This intensity did not at first make its effect; but as scene followed scene it grew more and more piercing till, by the time the last violent scenes were reached, the audience could scarcely endure the strain, and the curtain fell to a storm of applause that was almost hysterical. Irving had not only succeeded, he had conquered.

The performance did not please all tastes. What Hamlet ever does? There were always adverse critics (including some who should have known better) who pursued 'the fashionable tragedian' as they called him with abuse of the most scurrilous

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kind; but the public answered them effectively by giving his Hamlet a straight run of over a hundred nights. Three 'counterfeit presentments' of Irving as Hamlet exist, Edwin Long's picture, Onslow Ford's statue, and 'Caran D'Ache's' drawing, together with various caricatures. Long's portrait is the painting of a costume surmounted by a flat, expressionless face. Onslow Ford's statue is a splendid representation of Irving in a characteristic attitude; but it is not Hamlet, it is some or any character, much older; still, it is certainly Irving. Possibly the best of all is Caran D'Ache's drawing in the Green Room Club—if it still exists. This is a caricature, with a ridiculously tiny body; but the beautiful face and head are Irving's own, when he was still young. The Ophelia of the new Hamlet was Isabel Bateman; and in the midst of the run the old Colonel died. Mrs Bateman succeeded to the management, and put on *Macbeth* and *Othello*, in neither of which did Irving make a great success. Both were revived later in very different circumstances.

In 1876 Irving made his first excursion into Tennyson and played in *Queen Mary*. Irving was an excellent Philip, the character in which Whistler painted him; but the play was not a popular success, and the company fell back on *The Belle's Stratagem*. Three great triumphs followed, *Richard III*, *The Lyons Mail* and *Louis XI*. At the end of 1878 Mrs Bateman retired, not without pressure, and Irving became lessee and manager of the Lyceum Theatre. One of his first acts was to engage Ellen Terry as his leading lady; and during the next twenty years, with Irving exercising all his gifts, not merely as actor, but as producer and *metteur en scène*, and with Ellen Terry radiating loveliness and charm, the dingy old Lyceum of the Bateman days was transformed into a national temple of drama. Nothing was more remarkable than the unanimity with which the heads of all the other arts and professions accepted Irving as one worthy to rank with themselves—a fact that seemed specially to infuriate the anti-Irvingites, led by

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William Archer and Robert Lowe. Irving himself made no secret of his belief that the drama should be accorded the official recognition given to the other arts, and his dignified claim was at last acknowledged by a knighthood, conferred in 1895. His dream had come true! Since that date, theatrical knighthoods have been rather lavishly distributed, and it is time we grew a little more particular. Henry Irving had created for himself a unique position as the head of his profession, and he was properly knighted. Later dispensers of theatrical entertainment had no such claim and deserved no such distinction.

VII

It is not the purpose of this essay to describe the triumphs of the Lyceum during the reign of Irving and Ellen Terry. That story has been often told, sometimes ill, sometimes well. What I have sought to do is first to give a brief sketch of Irving as he was before the days of his accession to power, and then to discuss some of his greater performances. It is the story of a man who felt he had a genius for the theatre and cultivated it patiently in the opportunities that chance offered him. He knew he had not the volatility and versatility of Garrick, the statuesque grace of Kemble or the volcanic fire of Kean. But he was conscious of an extraordinary intensity that gave him access to the subtlest shades of character. This he could feel by instinct, without being able to define it. Intellectual in the ordinary sense Irving never was. Nor had he need to be. A great actor divines a part by creative instinct, not by intellectual study of the text. No great actor ever succeeded by his brains. One might truly say that outside the theatre Irving was not even intelligent; but the point is that he never was outside the theatre. He was always acting the great part of Henry Irving. Bernard Shaw, who pursued him with invective even beyond the grave, called him illiterate; but he was literate enough to know what parts were likely to suit Henry Irving and the

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Lyceum Theatre. He was literate enough to know that Shaw's *The Man of Destiny* would suit neither Irving nor the Lyceum; so after considering it he refused it. Shaw never forgot or forgave. To Irving this was a mere incident in a manager's life; to Shaw it was a deadly affront to his vanity and the loss of a great chance. The incident can be regretted; for though Irving might have felt that *The Man of Destiny* offered him no chance of success, he should have seen that there was enough promise in the play to justify him in encouraging the author to try again. But the two men were antipathetic. Irving would have insisted on producing any play in his own way; Shaw would have insisted on producing his own play in his own way; and the imagination boggles at the spectacle of Henry Irving being taught how to act on his own stage by Bernard Shaw, who was born in the year of Irving's first appearance at Sunderland. Irving was, if you choose to call him so, a monomaniac, and his best parts were those of monomaniacs. He took a monomaniac's view of his own art and presented himself sometimes in parts that were beyond his physical limitations; but he felt himself in those parts, and if the public did not like them, that was their loss. However, his failures were few, and there were always compensations. Certainly no part he ever played lacked interest.

In the next few pages I shall take three plays of his great period as illustrations of his special qualities. They are *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear* and *Becket*. I saw them several times, and they happen to be alike, as the chief character in each is a monomaniac. I begin with *The Merchant of Venice*, for I saw it first in the spring-time of life and in the happiest of years, 1887, when it was impossible to think that all was not right with the world. It was Jubilee Year, and there was a curious air of elation everywhere. I was a schoolboy, just growing up, and conscious of the thrill of things. I had read *The Merchant of Venice* at school, and knew much of it by heart. I felt familiar with all the characters—the villianous Shylock,

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the noble Antonio, the gallant Bassanio, the gay Gratiano, the clever Portia and the daring Jessica. So, as one of several Jubilee treats, I asked to be taken to the Lyceum. I have sometimes wondered whether I should date the dawn of my critical sense from that occasion; for the play that I saw with its lovely Venetian settings and costumes was quite unlike the play I had read and recited. The characters bore the same names, but had mysteriously changed their natures. Antonio was a dull and negative person; Bassanio was an unashamed money-hunter; Gratiano was a vulgar cad; Jessica was a thief; Portia was insincere, for she began the trial-scene with a moving appeal for mercy from the Jew, when she knew that her real purpose was to allow no mercy to the Jew. And who was this noble, impressive figure before whose dignity the Christian gentry seemed degraded into common creatures? It was Shylock the money-lender. I felt the trial-scene to be such an outrage that I could take no interest in the comedy of the rings. I wanted some one to go back and comfort the stricken Jew and undo the injustice. Next day I turned to the play and read it with new understanding. What I had seen on the stage was certainly true; but to find it one had to read *through* the text, to get beneath its surface. Certainly I had no illusion about Portia, Bassanio and Gratiano for ever after. Shylock is not so easy to understand. Bernard Shaw says that it is not a question whether Irving was a good or a bad Shylock, the point is that he was not Shylock at all. That is simply nonsense. In no later performance that I saw and in no later criticism that I read could I feel convinced that Irving had substituted his own Shylock for Shakespeare's. Irving's Shylock is implicit in the play; a comically villainous Shylock in whose downfall we rejoice is not implicit in the play. Shylock was not an evil creature like Marlowe's Barabas. What crime had he committed? Money-lending was not a crime, but, as I was to learn later, a necessity of commerce, especially in a state like Venice, where riches consisted in goods and not in gold. Usury was

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forbidden to Christians by the Church; but the Pope himself was glad to borrow from the Catholic Fuggers, who took care to profit from their transactions. Of course one never really believes in the pound of flesh story, because it is in every sense incredible. It has to be taken as a symbol of Shylock's hatred of Antonio, a hatred, as Antonio himself declares, which is not without many causes, and he expressly asks Shylock to lend him the money as to an enemy. Portia suggests that Shylock should provide a surgeon at his own expense to stop the bleeding of Antonio's wounds. None of the intelligent Christians had thought of that necessity, not even Antonio himself. Shylock's sole crime is the proposing of a 'merry bond', which, if forfeit, would have entitled him to commit something like murder. But Antonio himself signed the bond without the least compulsion by Shylock. There was neither conspiracy nor compulsion. As the terms of the bond were never exacted, Shylock's crime is purely theoretical; no one suffers the least injury; but Shylock's punishment, as declared by the mercy-pleading Portia, is utterly merciless. Shylock is a deeply wronged man, suffering daily insult to his person, his profession, his race and his religion, and revenge becomes a monomania with him. The crowning infamy of Shylock's punishment is that he is to become a Christian—a crowning mercy, no doubt, in the opinion of the fifteen-nineties; but the conversion is demanded as a punishment, not offered as a saving grace. When I saw the play as a boy I had no feelings about Jews, for I had never met any. Now I think the plot worthy of Hitler—the plot, I say, not the play. In considering *The Merchant of Venice* we must distinguish sharply between the plot and the play. It was Shakespeare himself who lifted Shylock above the plot; and Irving played the Jew that Shakespeare drew. Shakespeare, not Irving, let Shylock steal the play from the Christians. So Irving's Shylock needs neither apology nor defence. As acting, the performance was magnificent. Every aspect of Shylock's character was presented with elaborated detail, and the whole

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part became, not an accumulation of points, but a strongly drawn and strongly coloured picture from the hand of an old Venetian master. I have always thought Shylock one of Irving's greatest creations. His final exit was a triumph of dramatic art. No one can pretend that a mere reading of the play, however intense, will produce such an emotional effect.

VIII

After Shylock, what a change to Mephistopheles! I first saw *Faust* in 1888, and it seemed a superb pantomime with Irving as the Demon King. True, there was a sad story about a girl in it; but in my youthful experience there were sad stories about women in most plays—that seemed to be why they were there. I knew a little about Goethe's *Faust*, and more when I saw a later revival. But when I did become familiar with the real *Faust* I wondered why the critics were so down on the *Faust* of W. G. Wills as a shameful travesty of Goethe. Why drag in Goethe? He had as little to do with the Lyceum *Faust* as with the Covent Garden *Faust* in which I used to hear the incomparable Jean de Reszke and Melba. To discuss whether popular entertainments in theatre or cinema should be based on great masterpieces is a matter that must not detain me here, for I must hurry on, past *Robert Macaire*, past *The Dead Heart*, past *Ravenswood*, past *Henry VIII*, past several revivals (including *The Bells*) and come to the end of 1892, when Irving produced *King Lear*. I can speak of this with some confidence, as I saw the first performance and three later ones. Moreover, I was no longer a schoolboy tamely taken to the theatre; I was nearly twenty and by this time a keen reader of Shakespeare, besides being a lover of the theatre, and especially of the Lyceum. *Lear* was considered a failure at the time and in works of reference is usually so described. I declare, on the contrary, that it was not a failure, but a most impressive and memorable performance. I pause to warn students of the acted drama against taking

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their information exclusively from first-night notices written by newspaper critics. Consider, for a moment, what is meant by producing *King Lear*. Irving was his own producer. He rehearsed his players ruthlessly in every detail of their parts. He instructed his scenic artists, his costume makers, his property masters, and made suggestions to his composers. The whole show, if I may use the word, was invented and devised by him. The labour of producing such a work would have exhausted any ordinary man; yet Irving not only did all that, but played the principal and most terribly exacting character. His first night's performance was, not unnaturally, the worst he gave, especially in speech. He was overwrought and was uncontrolled in voice. I had read Lamb's famous essay on the tragedies of Shakespeare, in which he declares that the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted; but that, surely, depends on what we mean by acting. I was conscious of seeing something more vast than I had ever seen before in the theatre, something too vast for me to take in at once. So, after waiting a little to study the play carefully, I went to the theatre on three successive nights, and found the play, not indeed a failure, but a tremendous, triumphant presentation of the text. Are we bound to use the words 'success', 'successful', in describing or assessing an artistic creation of unusual dimensions? Any small work—a sketch, a statuette, a lyric—may be quite successful; but an epic poem or a tragedy may have a greatness that transcends success—a word, in fact, that belongs more to commerce than to art. Irving's Lear was less successful than, say, his Charles I; but Charles I was a miniature, entirely incomparable with the huge scale of Lear. I do not know, but I imagine that even such a part as Shylock made no unusual physical demands on the actor; Lear taxed all his resources. In the last scene a great sensation was made when Lear came running wildly in with the dead body of Cordelia slung across his shoulder. That is how it appeared to the audience. Knowing a little more now about stage effects I am well aware that this was an illusion, that what

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seemed a run was no more than a few stumbling steps made while the crowd rushed forward and laid the body reverently on the ground. Still, Irving was nearly fifty-five and Ellen Terry was a large and heavy woman. Even a couple of steps with such a burden would be a strain, especially as Lear has to begin an impassioned speech without a pause for rest. These things should be remembered. One proof of the deep impression the performance made on me is that if I close my eyes at night and think of the Lyceum, the scenes that come vividly pictured are always those from *Lear*. Of course I can clearly recall scenes from many other plays if I specifically ask them to come; the scenes from *Lear* come without being called. So my first picture is the unforgettable entry of the King, white-haired, white-bearded, heavily robed, striding uncertainly forward by the help of a great scabbarded sword, which he occasionally waved in response to greetings; for here at once is struck the note of the play—regality. That was Lear's tragedy, his monomania; he could give away his kingdom, but he could not give away his kingship. His mind might totter, he might lose his sense of the world, but he could never lose his sense of regality. How splendidly that was brought out in the scene by Dover Cliff, where Lear, fantastically decked with wild flowers, skipping about and murmuring to himself, suddenly encounters the blinded Gloucester, who, hearing the voice, says, 'Is't not the King?'; and instantly the madman vanishes, and Lear, magnificently regal for a moment, replies 'Ay, every inch a king!'. It was a king indeed! Lamb was right when he said that Lear cannot be acted, if by acting you mean the usual stock of stage tricks. But my pictures of Irving's Lear show me nothing like acting. I see that heath of ancient Britain in a night of raging tempest, and, raging with the tempest, a scarcely human figure, babbling wildly and almost floating in the whirling air, elemental, native and indued unto the elements; for Lear is not merely in the storm, Lear is the storm. Nature is but echoing the tempest in his soul. This is

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not acting, it is transfiguration. Only the wretched figure of the Fool tells us that we are still on the earth. But, some one asks, was not Irving sometimes grotesque? Yes, if to see a mad old king stumbling through the fields and talking wildly yet cunningly to a blind old man is grotesque, then Irving was grotesque. But if you play such a scene sanely you are not playing *King Lear*. Actually, Irving's exit at the words 'Nay, an you get it, you shall get it by running. Sa, sa, sa, sa' was one of the most poignant moments of the play. But, some one asks, was not Irving sometimes incoherent? Yes, he was sometimes incoherent. But do you really think that Lear ought to be perfectly coherent? If he is coherent, is he Lear? Indeed, is *King Lear* coherent, or is it not a libretto of incoherence? Some of its lines and sentences cut deep into the heart, but there is nothing for the mouthing ranter to play with. I do not mean that Shakespeare wrote deliberate nonsense, but I am sure he wrote the kind of play in which regality in ruins could find expression. *Macbeth* and *Othello* are models of structure compared with *King Lear*. The one firmly coherent figure is the incoherent Lear. Can anyone take seriously the disguise of Kent or the scenes in which Edmund secures the downfall of Edgar? Of all Shakespeare's villains Edmund is the least convincing. He cannot endure comparison with Iago. And so the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted. Take, in the words of Lamb, 'an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night', equip him with poses, gestures and speech all duly certified by an Academy of Dramatic Art, and you will get nothing like Lear. You will get acting when you want creation. But make your stage the tenement of Lear's tempestuous spirit, take for your player a man of imaginative genius who will lift the performance beyond mere acting and flood the scenes with the emanations of a royal soul, expressed not so much in words as in ejaculations, in weighty mutterings of kingship and authority battered and tempest-tossed by the forces of evil, and you will

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get a Lear that will haunt your memory, as it has haunted mine for half a century. But some of the critics were disappointed. They thought that in the storm scene Irving was 'vocally inadequate'. Good heavens! Do they want a roaring Lear? In 1893 I heard Mounet-Sully roar his way through *Hamlet*; and I thought, 'This is magnificent roaring, but it is not *Hamlet*.' There is nothing to be roared in *Lear*, least of all the speeches in the storm. 'Nay, an you get it, you'll not get it by roaring.' Irving's quieter scenes were deeply moving. Lear lying asleep in Cordelia's tent was as compelling of attention as Lear confronting the elements, and his awaking and the recognition of Cordelia were the perfection of simplicity. Such was the performance that was described as a failure. It was one of the greatest triumphs of English acting, conceived with high creative imagination and executed with unequalled skill by a great dramatic artist.

My views about the acting of *King Lear*, formed by seeing Henry Irving's intense performance, may seem hardy in a young man of twenty; but I think my very youth was an asset in my judgement. I had no preconceptions, no prejudices. In actors as persons I had then, as now, no interest. But I loved the theatre and the art that brought life on to the stage. Just as I found that *The Merchant of Venice* which I saw at the Lyceum was more true than the play I had read in a book, so I found *King Lear* more intense than if I had read whole treatises about it. I could recognize, as I hardly could from mere study, that *King Lear* is not just a series of incidents, but a series of soul-states. I found my youthful impressions confirmed when I next saw the play a dozen years later in Paris. André Antoine, the founder of the French Théâtre Libre, was an actor of great courage and intelligence, and he produced a version of the play at what was then called the Théâtre Antoine in the Boulevard de Strasbourg. The staging was simple and easily adaptable to various scenes, and the play was therefore given more rapidly than at the Lyceum—Irving was never a quick actor. So far,

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that was a gain. Antoine himself played Lear with great intelligence and was well-supported by a company that kept the play moving and vivid. But it was acting. It was not transformation. Of the elemental quality that makes *Lear* unique among tragedies there was no trace; nor did Antoine ever leave the earth to become a wild creature of the storm. Here was no regal figure, so sure of authority that in the division of his kingdom he keeps not even a house for himself. This insulted and injured Lear of Paris might have come out of Balzac—not every inch a king, but every inch a bourgeois. So, as far as I was concerned, this *King Lear* was a failure. Its magic power over the imagination had vanished. No scenes from Antoine's *Lear* ever come unbidden into my dream-pictures of the past. I saw another performance at Stratford which I thought very adequate—the sort of performance to which you could safely take a party of secondary schoolboys and schoolgirls, and such a performance has its merits. It is a pleasure to record that in our own times there have been two outstanding performances of this, the most difficult of plays to bring to life on the stage.

IX

From a play generally condemned as a failure I turn to a play universally hailed as a success—to *Becket*. Irving had already drawn upon Tennyson for *Queen Mary* and *The Cup* and he now adapted *Becket* for the stage. Tennyson was dead and beyond knowledge of the ruthless hacking of his play to fit the stage; but the 'illiterate' Irving (*pace* Bernard Shaw) did his hacking so well that the new version was one of the three most successful plays produced at the Lyceum, and was always a stand-by for tours and revivals. The part of Becket might have been expressly written for Irving, so perfectly did he play it. I did not believe in the prologue presenting Becket as the riotous friend of the king. Irving was in fact much given to late nights with a few old friends, but he looked an ascetic, and

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in the change from voluptuary to archbishop there was little but a change of costume. The play did not begin for me till Becket had donned the Augustinian habit and had begun the exposition of his fatal monomania, the absolute independence of the Church. Becket is not really a sympathetic figure, for he embodies a principle which England soon rejected and which no modern state could accept. Tennyson, however, took the medieval view and made Becket the martyred saint to whom the richest shrine in England was erected and to whom pilgrims travelled to make their vows. Such was the figure that Irving presented on the stage. His Becket was the strong selfless saint whom all, save the evil-doers about the king, could love as the protector of the poor and the defender of the distressed. The characteristic Irving gait gave place to the motion of one who trod upon holy ground. His speech had an unearthly dignity as that of a man who died daily. Stern and menacing he could be to his foes, but among his brethren he was gentle and tender. The scene in the monastery before the murder in the cathedral was, I dare to say, the most beautiful exposition of English speech I have heard on the stage. The performance was everywhere flawless. To have seen Irving as Lear and Becket is a high privilege worth the cost of age.

X

Becket proved to be the last of Irving's great parts. There followed perhaps only one to be praised and several to be lamented. Then misfortune befell him. Of this we shall speak later. At the moment, with the memory haunted by that huddled figure lying at the foot of the steps in the Cathedral as a thunderstorm rent the dreadful silence, it is fitting to consider some qualities of Irving's art not already indicated. I have a strongly rooted objection to the discussion of one art in terms of another; but no harm is done if we occasionally borrow a term from one art and apply it to another by way of com-

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parison or illustration. I use my term merely as a metaphor, and a metaphor is just a piece of literary shorthand. It seems to me that Irving's greater productions resembled what nineteenth-century musicians called symphonic poems. He did not take a play and get it performed. He took words, scenes, costumes, music, lighting and acting and composed them all into one symphonic piece, the principal theme, of course, being his own part. Nothing existed by and for itself, everything existed for the total symphonic effect. So Irving never lost his head about scenery and properties as Tree did, with his real rabbits and ridiculous *tableaux vivants*. Tree cut out the whole of the first scene of *The Tempest* in order to stage a realistic shipwreck—which was not in the least realistic but completely stagey—and he defended such attempts at realism as 'imaginative interpretation'. All Irving's scenes were of rich but quiet beauty and were kept in due subordination to the whole symphonic effect. Some symphonic works in music call for a higher degree of listening than others. That was certainly true of Irving's theatrical compositions. The *Charles I* and *Olivia* symphonies were so simple that the most unsophisticated of playgoers could follow them easily. *Louis XI* was an elaborate *Danse Macabre*. So, in a different way, was *The Bells*; so, too, was *The Lyons Mail*. *Cymbeline*, a very beautiful romantic symphony, just missed success because the Iachimo theme was too prominent and spoiled the balance of the parts. *The Merchant of Venice*, with its spirited variations, presented a noble theme, the evil of racial and religious persecution, and, as I have said, was even finer than its design. *Much Ado about Nothing*, a brilliant *bravura* piece, found the right place between comedy and tragedy. *King Lear* was the most difficult of all these symphonic poems and needed more careful hearings than most playgoers were prepared to give it. It seemed like an elaborate study in incoherence; but its apparent incoherence was artistically coherent. The Lear theme was what Berlioz would have called the *idée fixe*, pervading in

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powerfully varied forms the whole of this tremendous symphony, at once tragic and fantastic. It did not offer easy entertainment to anyone. But is *King Lear* required to do that? Really one is puzzled to understand some people's notion of artistic pleasure. To those incapable of hearing Beethoven's quartet in C sharp minor the best performance will be no better than the worst. To them it will be a failure, as the *Lear* of Irving was. But it is the audience that fails, not the piece. Of the *Becket* symphony we need say only this, that over it might have been written Elgar's favourite direction to his players, *nobilmente*.

I have dwelt upon the symphonic nature of Irving's productions, because that was their essential quality, their *differentia*. The stage of my time showed nothing whatever of the same character. It is beside the mark to quote such producers as Gordon Craig and Max Reinhardt. Irving flourished long before they began their work; moreover, though each was an actor of sorts, neither produced plays for himself to act in. To them, as to later producers, the production was a thing in itself, claiming for itself special recognition as a work of art. Irving cared for the perfection of the whole and gave to production no more than its due share. The level of theatrical performance was so raised by Irving that the Lyceum became, during his reign, a sort of unofficial National Theatre, and this was recognized not only by the leaders of society, the arts and the professions, but by a huge Lyceum public to whom Irving was the greatest attraction of the stage, even though at times, as in *The Dead Heart* and *The Master of Ravenswood*, he tested their loyalty severely.

XI

I want now to deal with certain charges made against Irving, especially by one critic, and mechanically repeated ever since. These charges are refuted by the facts, which I here adduce. They are really the same charge in various disguises. The first

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is that during his long reign as actor-manager at the Lyceum Irving did nothing for the English drama. Then what, exactly, was he doing during those twenty years? The reply is, that he was just acting. But an actor cannot act without doing something for the drama. If making a dingy old playhouse into a national theatre, if setting new and higher standards of production, if making that theatre into an institution of international fame is doing nothing, one would like to know exactly what doing something is. One writer, giving the charge a new turn, says expressly: 'He did nothing for native dramatists, and was an obstacle rather than a help to the intellectual drama then awakening.' That is a most astonishing sentence, which is either sheer ignorance or sheer impudence. Exactly what intellectual drama, and exactly when awakening? In the twenty years between 1878 and 1898 is there the faintest symptom of any national drama then awakening or the slightest evidence that Irving obstructed it? Most of the plays he produced were English, and, in spite of Bernard Shaw, one might even dare to call *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear* intellectual. Irving certainly took no part in the first attempts to stage Ibsen here, but Ibsen is not a native dramatist, nor were his plays suited to the Lyceum, which was a large, ceremonial theatre, as unfitted for domestic drama as Covent Garden is for domestic opera. Irving would have been magnificent as John Gabriel Borkman with Ellen Terry as Ella Rentheim, but the play would have been dead against all the traditions of the Lyceum, and the public would not have supported it. Irving and Terry certainly read the play together and she was definitely hostile. I think a great opportunity was lost, for the power and poetry of Borkman have never been adequately represented here; but in any case Ibsen, as a foreign author, does not come into the argument. Irving might have played in Barrie's *The Professor's Love Story*, but would that have helped the cause of a native intellectual drama perceptibly? As the critic goes on to say, 'he overloaded his productions with upholstery and

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scenery that were so lavish that he himself was almost dwarfed by them', we are bound to conclude that he must be writing about the wrong actor. A dwarfed Irving barely emerging from a welter of his own upholstery is a spectacle so grotesque that we may cease to wonder why he 'did nothing for the intellectual drama then awakening'. The whole charge is mere ignorant stupidity. Henry Irving was a great actor, and he was nothing more. Why should a great actor be expected to create a native intellectual drama? His business is to act plays, not to make them. The Elizabethan drama was not created by Burbage and Alleyn. What did Garrick, what did Kean, do for the native intellectual drama? Let us consider the actual facts. During the period from 1871 to his death in 1905 Irving appeared in original plays or adaptations by such living writers as James Albery, Leopold Lewis, W. G. Wills, Hamilton Aidé, Alfred Tennyson, A. C. Calmour, Percy Fitzgerald, Herman Merivale, Comyns Carr, Conan Doyle, Laurence Irving, H. D. Traill and Robert Hichens—the last two in collaboration. These, surely, are the people who should have done something for the modern English intellectual drama. Who were the other dramatists of the period? These: H. J. Byron, F. C. Burnand, W. S. Gilbert, George R. Sims, Henry Pettitt, Paul Meritt, Sydney Grundy, A. W. Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, Jerome K. Jerome, Robert Buchanan, R. C. Carton, Haddon Chambers, Basil Hood, Louis N. Parker, Cecil Raleigh, Justin Huntley McCarthy, Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde. That list exposes the shocking poverty of the English drama during the Irving period. Only two names of real importance appear, those of Shaw and Wilde, and they come right at the end. The most hopeful modern play produced by Irving was *Peter the Great* by his tragic son Laurence in 1898. It was an ill-governed and overloaded piece, but it had the grand manner and showed that the young author had power.

Surely it is time to drop the cant accusation that Irving did nothing for modern dramatists and to make the much more

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serious accusation that modern dramatists did nothing for Irving. Here was a great theatre dominated by a great actor of extraordinary gifts, yet not a single dramatist made any attempt to supply the needed plays. The truth is that we had no poet, no one with any sign of imaginative power. Coquelin and Sarah Bernhardt had the luck to find a Rostand; Irving found no one, for even Stephen Phillips did not emerge till Irving was near his end. Irving's last triumph had come from Tennyson; but there was no more Tennyson to draw upon. Browning? No; Browning had already proved to be undramatic. We had in fact come to the end of an old song. A. B. Walkley's *Playhouse Impressions* (1892), which contains the best short essay on Irving yet written, has a passage which gives us a clue to the difficulty. Though he acknowledges that universal categories are now outmoded, Walkley finds it convenient to adopt Gautier's division of mankind into two great classes of *Flamboyant* and *Drab*. 'It is the glory of Mr Irving [he writes] that he gives the world the spectacle, all too rare, of the two classes in their proper relationship; that is, the second subservient to the first. A flamboyant of the flamboyants, he has conquered the drab public.... In the great Reckoning Day of the arts, this shall be counted unto him for righteousness. He has vindicated the supremacy of Romance in the face of all Philistia.' Walkley had not reckoned with his colleague Bernard Shaw, who was to be the champion of the drab. Glance at the list of dramatists given above and you find the drab triumphant. Wilde? Who can say what Wilde might have done had he not been extinguished at forty-one? And of all the drabs the drabbest was Bernard Shaw, who made it his job for three years and a half to attack Irving as actor, manager and producer for not being drab and for not making Ellen Terry drab. Not a person in that list of dramatists was capable of writing a play for the flamboyant of flamboyants, certainly not Shaw, though he was for ever embittered against Irving for rejecting *The Man of Destiny*. Shaw's notion of a

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play at this period was a discussion about slum-property, philandering and prostitution, and he seemed astonished that Ellen Terry should prefer her Lyceum parts to his. It was not till later years, when Irving was dead, that Shaw became commercially successful in the English theatre. The fact is not creditable to the English theatre, but it is a fact. Cyril Maude put *You Never Can Tell* into rehearsal at the Haymarket, but withdrew it, for the company was dead against it. The reader of Shaw's dramatic essays must therefore remember that he is reading the opinions of a disappointed playwright, to whom romance, as represented by Shakespeare and Irving, was an accursed thing.

Your true romantic actor can do nothing with the drab. He needs something beyond fact, something a little larger than life. To give Irving a drab part was to use a razor for cutting sticks; but if there was something, however little, of the unusual in a part, Irving's genius could seize upon it and make it a creation. The romantic genius is really the poetizing genius, something divorced from the drabness of prose. So the great masters of narrative, from Homer to Dickens, are all romantic. What drab tale has ever survived? Even the apparently drab story-tellers, like Defoe, cunningly turn their drab details into romance. It really seems to be a necessity of human nature that it must sometimes get over the edge of beyond. There is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out! The romantic temperament enabled Irving to give *The Bells* the stature of tragedy, to make *The Corsican Brothers* a weird prose-poem touched by a spirit not of this world, to infuse into the melodrama of *The Lyons Mail* the diablerie of a Dance of Death. To read any of these things in print is like opening a kaleidoscope to find its magic. You must have done with the drab fact if you would call back the visions. The drab dramatists of his day could do nothing for the flamboyant Irving. Walkley suggests that the creator of Old Mel and Richmond Roy might have succeeded; but there was no trace

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of the dramatist in Meredith. Even as a novelist he drowned his tales in words. So, at the end, Irving was driven to Sardou, who was at least not drab, though he proved disastrous.

Another charge made by Shaw against Irving is that he gave us 'mangled' texts of Shakespeare. That is wilful distortion of the truth. Shaw, who ridiculed the Bard and Bardolatry week by week, became indignant if Irving's pen touched the sacred text. Irving went back to the original texts of plays that had always been mangled. He did not give us Tate's *Lear* or Colley Cibber's *Richard III*, though the latter lasted right up to my own time. Irving cut and arranged the plays to shorten the number of scenes and he purged the text of its less polite expressions. But that was the normal expectation of the times. His first London appearance in Shakespeare was in *Hamlet*, which no one had presented uncut. We were far away from the Elizabethan Stage Society, far from Granville Barker and his all too few productions, and far from the Old Vic in the days of Lilian Bayliss and Robert Atkins, that being the second nearest approach we have had to a National Theatre. But by that time Irving was long dead. Tree hacked the plays to pieces and interpolated scenes without arousing indignation. F. R. Benson, in the course of his long and honourable career, produced thirty-five of the plays and cut them all, though he was the first man I ever saw play the whole of *Hamlet*; but this was an exception, not his normal procedure. In playing Shakespeare Irving was textually at the level of his time. To call him in a special sense the 'mangler' of Shakespeare is contrary to ascertainable fact.

The last charge I shall notice here is that Irving held in bondage the greatest English actress of his time and compelled her to subdue herself to his inordinate vanity. Here is one characteristic outburst:

> I should prove myself void of the true critic's passion if I could pass with polite commonplaces over what seems to me a heartless waste of an exquisite talent. What a theatre for a woman of genius to be

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attached to! Obsolete tomfooleries like *Robert Macaire*, schoolgirl charades like *Nance Oldfield*, blank verse by Wills, Comyns Carr and Calmour, with intervals of hashed Shakespeare; and all the time a stream of splendid women's parts pouring from the Ibsen volcano and minor craters and being snapped up by the rising generation.

Bernard Shaw, *Dramatic Opinions and Essays.*

That is evidently a dramatic opinion, for it is not criticism. It is refuted by the facts. Ellen Terry was engaged by Irving as leading lady immediately he became manager in 1878. She was then nearly thirty-one. 'And *all the time* a stream of splendid women's parts', etc. Yes? Exactly what parts? Neither the Ibsen volcano nor any other crater was pouring out splendid women's parts in 1878 or anywhere near it. The best women's parts then to be played were actually the parts she played. The plays cited by Shaw as unworthy of Ellen Terry are soon disposed of. *Robert Macaire* was an old frolic of Irving's. Ellen Terry appeared in it once in a 'star cast' show given in aid of the Royal College of Music. When Irving revived it in 1888 Ellen Terry took no part in it, but had a play of her own, *The Amber Heart* by A. C. Calmour, at whom Shaw gratuitously sneers. Neither play nor author was of the first rank, but Irving generously gave both a chance—and Calmour was one of the native dramatists for whom Irving is alleged to have done nothing. I am not prepared to eulogize Wills as a poet-dramatist, but he gave Ellen Terry three of her best parts, Olivia, Henrietta Maria and Gretchen, the first of which she had made her own before her engagement by Irving. And what is the matter with the one-act comedy *Nance Oldfield*, which gives an actress a chance to enjoy all the tricks of the stage? Ellen Terry enjoyed playing in it as Wyndham enjoyed playing in *David Garrick*—a male version of the same story. Bernard Shaw, who knew so much, never knew that actors like good parts, not good plays. The convenient phrase 'hashed Shakespeare' at once wipes out a whole series of lovely impersonations which are a treasure to all who remember

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them. Did Ellen Terry ever want to play Hedda Gabler and Magda and the rest of that crowd? Moreover, did the public want her to play them? There is not a particle of evidence that she had any desire to play the dowdy females who appealed to Shaw's sexless fancy. She was not bound for life to the Lyceum. She could have left at any time. Fortunately she did not; and the result of this 'heartless waste of an exquisite talent' was that for twenty years she was the undisputed queen of the English stage. But, after all, the most complete refutation of the charge is a list of the characters upon which Irving compelled her to waste her genius: Pauline, Ophelia, Portia, Queen Henrietta Maria, Iolanthe (*King René's Daughter*), Camma, Desdemona, Lady Macbeth, Letitia Hardy, Juliet, Beatrice, Viola, Olivia, Margaret (*Faust*), Catherine (*The Dead Heart*), Lucy Ashton, Queen Katherine, Cordelia, Rosamund de Clifford, Guinevere, Imogen, Nance Oldfield, Ellaline (*The Amber Heart*), Volumnia, Catherine (*Peter the Great*), Catherine (*Madame Sans-Gêne*), Clarisse (*Robespierre*), and Sylvia Wynford (*The Medicine Man*). She also played Helen in scenes from *The Hunchback*, and Josephine in *Werner*, but these were single performances for special occasions. The most impudent mendacity cannot dare to say that this catalogue, containing some of the greatest parts in the English drama, represents the heartless waste of the genius of a great actress. What other English actress had such glorious opportunities? The characters have immense variety, but they have this common quality, that not one of them is drab. They all belong to romance. Can anyone name precisely what parts available between 1878 and 1898 Ellen Terry could and should have played, and was prevented from playing by Irving? And what has become of that 'stream of splendid women's parts' and of the 'rising generation' which snapped them up? Ellen Terry remains a delightful legend of the stage; only a few elderly playgoers remember the others, and with no special emotion. After the great Lyceum partnership was severed by misfortune Ellen Terry

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had no luck. She had bad parts and she took risks that brought her to ruin. She was saved by a public benefit which was most generously supported by those who had loved the great parts in which she is said to have had her talent heartlessly wasted. But no weapon was too bad for Shaw to use against Irving. While the actor was lying dead Shaw wrote a disgraceful article on him in *Die Neue Freie Presse* of Vienna, and grandly refused to attend the Abbey funeral service on the ground that 'Literature has no place by Irving's graveside'—a characteristically modest identification of himself with an art which he never understood. To him, literature was the discussion of social or moral problems, and original morality 'sets Ibsen's work as a whole above Shakespeare's work as a whole'. We need go no further than that monumentally absurd pronouncement to discover why Shaw was able to comprehend neither Shakespeare nor Irving.

XII

The story of Henry Irving ends in tragedy. The turning of the tide in his career of triumph came, as we are told by his faithful chronicler and manager Bram Stoker, at the end of 1896, after the first night of a successful revival of *Richard III*, when he slipped on the stair of his rooms and ruptured the ligaments of a knee. For ten weeks he was laid up at the cost of many thousands of pounds. That was but the prologue. In February 1898 a fire completely destroyed the Lyceum storage housed under two great arches of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway, as it was then called. All the scenery for over forty plays—two hundred and sixty whole scenes, two thousand smaller pieces of scenery, and the larger properties for all went up in smoke. The place seemed so completely secure that the insurance had been reduced from £10,000 to £6,000; but not £10,000 nor £100,000 could call back this accumulation of years. With his scenery and properties intact Irving need never

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have produced a new play; he could have lived on his repertory. Now, an ageing and impoverished man, he stood naked on an empty stage. His financial future began to darken. But his courage was unshaken, and he worked on. In October 1898, during a provincial tour, he was stricken at Glasgow with pleurisy and pneumonia. This tall, lean man had seemed inexhaustible, unbreakable. He had scarcely known what illness meant; now he was sorely stricken and never really recovered. He began to listen, perhaps too readily, to proposals of companies or syndicates to take the Lyceum off his hands and leave him free to act; and when he appeared at the theatre again in 1899 it was no longer as its master. After that nothing went right. He appeared in unsuitable, expensive and unprofitable plays. Still undaunted he made long provincial tours with old favourites and even made another triumphant American tour (1903–4)—his eighth. But disease was gnawing at him. He suffered from chronic throat trouble and at last reached a state in which, as Bram Stoker tells us, he was using pocket handkerchiefs at the rate of five hundred a week. Yet the strange fact is that on the stage he showed no sign of weakness. During a provincial tour in 1905 he fainted in the hotel at Wolverhampton after playing one night. A very discerning doctor discovered that for a long time he had been spitting pus from an unhealed lung. Once more he had to rest. In the summer of that year came a short season at Drury Lane, every night of which was a personal triumph. The last night of all there produced an ovation which no one present will forget. We knew we should never see him again. In October he began an autumn tour at Sheffield, at which the Lord Mayor gave him a public luncheon. Irving spoke quite well in his speech of thanks. The next town was Bradford, and again he went through a civic function normally. Though so feeble that he had to pause for breath at every step he ascended, he actually played Mathias, the most exhausting of his parts, and was nearly killed by the effort. Then the faithful Bram

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Stoker did a bold and brave thing: he gave orders that all the scenery and properties for *The Bells* were to be sent back to London. When told, Irving quietly acquiesced. Next day, Irving, Stoker and Loveday the stage manager met to discuss future plans now that *The Bells* had been cut out. Irving himself declared that next year's American tour would have to be abandoned. He was quite cheerful, but, as Loveday thought, ominously acquiescent. He went down to the theatre in the evening and played Becket, one of his quiet parts. The last words the stricken Archbishop utters are 'Into Thy hands, O Lord—into Thy hands'. They were the last words that Henry Irving spoke on the stage. He retired to his room and had a few moments' chat with Stoker, who had to leave in order to see a visitor off to Birmingham. Irving got back to his hotel and collapsed on the floor of the hall. Almost at the stroke of midnight he quietly ceased to breathe. A wave of grief spread throughout the land, for with him there had passed away, not only a great actor, but a great figure in English public life. They buried his ashes in Westminster Abbey, whither Garrick had preceded him in 1779. They have buried no actor there since.

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§ vii

The Century of Divine Songs

A LECTURER who intends to unload upon you a bundle of very dry goods is tempted to use a decorative label. As I shall be found out sooner or later, I will at once explain my equivocal title, and tell you that I propose to talk about the English hymn in the eighteenth century, meaning by a hymn a simple composition in verse intended to be sung by a congregation assembled for public worship.

Before dismay settles too deeply upon you, I beg you to consider that hymns have sometimes had national importance and that the eighteenth century is sometimes misjudged. The hymn has been the poor man's poetry, the only poetry that has ever come home to his heart. When he sings,

> Abide with me, fast falls the eventide,
> The darkness deepens, Lord with me abide,

he makes the emotional response that the more fortunately endowed person makes to great poetry. Further, the hymn is the ordinary man's theology. Theology is a science; what the ordinary man needs is to have that science made simple for him. In fact, what he needs is not theology, but religion, not theory, but practice. The hymn echoes in the heart when the sermon is forgotten. Preachers may be feeble, and even foolish; but hymn does more than pulpit can to justify God's ways to man. It follows, therefore, that people should be given real hymns, and not deceptive imitations. Some people make a grave charge against hymns, and say that they are not poetry. I make a much graver charge, and say that many of them are not hymns. A hymn, like a ballad or a shanty, is a species of its own, and must be true to itself, and not spread itself out as a

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jelloid substance of blancmange consistency, flaccid, easily swallowed, and totally innutritious. A hymn must present religious doctrine, religious duty, and religious mythology.

I can, on this occasion, say very little about the hymns of earlier periods. We have to get past the morass of actions and reactions called so simply the Reformation before we come to the English hymn; and when we have reached it, we find it is nothing but a metrical psalm. I suppose the oldest English hymn still in general use is the noble Old Hundredth, 'All people that on earth do dwell', which appeared simultaneously in Daye's Psalter of 1560–1 and in the Anglo-Genevan Psalter of 1561. The author was William Keth or Kethe. The beginning of a metrical psalter was made in 1548 by Thomas Sternhold. His work was continued by John Hopkins, Thomas Norton, and others; and in 1562 *The Whole Book of Psalms collected into English Metre* was added as a supplement to the Prayer Book. I shall say nothing about that or about other versions that displaced it. But we should note that revolt from the long tyranny of the metrical psalms gave us our first congregational hymns.

The great outburst of religious poetry during the seventeenth century added little to our body of hymns. I said at the beginning, in my definition of a hymn, that it was meant for congregational singing at public worship, and I wish to distinguish clearly between private poems and poems for public use. Herbert's 'Let all the world in every corner sing' is certainly a hymn; but I maintain against all compilers, from John Wesley onwards, that *The Elixir*, that delightful philosophy of right thinking and right living, is not suitable for public singing. In at least one hymn-book I have found John Donne's *Hymn to God the Father*, which is an intensely private and personal outpouring of man to God. To sing it in public seems to me shocking. The lesser people serve us better. Bishop Ken's morning and evening hymns will always be used; and from the most unpromising Nahum Tate comes the ever delightful

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'While shepherds watched their flocks by night'. Actually the most important figure in seventeenth-century hymnody is the minor poet George Wither, for in *The Hymnes and Songs of the Church* (1623) he made a frontal attack on the metrical psalms. But unfortunately he did no more than extend the area of paraphrase to the Bible and the Prayer Book—he even versified the Athanasian Creed—and still more unfortunately, he turned great prose into mere doggerel. He was so sure that his verses would be sung that he added tunes composed by no less a man than Orlando Gibbons. Wither failed; but he was on the right track.

The next essential of a hymn is that it should have a purpose. All great poetry (and bad) has a purpose. You may want to challenge that. But if you believe that poetry is, like nursery rhymes, sound without sense, that poetry is fine art entirely purified from ideas, you will have all the poets, from Homer to Hardy, against you. I am sorry to leave so tempting a subject undiscussed, but I must pass on, declaring that poetry has a purpose, and that the purpose of a hymn is to make known, in a form suitable for congregational singing, religious doctrine, religious duty, and religious mythology.

So let us turn at last to the eighteenth century. The first great figure we meet is Joseph Addison (1672–1719), with five celebrated hymns printed in *The Spectator* towards the end of 1712: 'The Lord my pasture shall prepare' in No. 441; 'When all thy mercies, O my God' in No. 453; 'The spacious firmament on high' in No. 465; 'How are thy servants blest, O Lord' in No. 489; and 'When rising from the bed of death' in No. 513. No. 461 contains a letter and a hymn contributed by another hand—the hand of Dr Watts, Addison's almost exact contemporary. The hymn is a paraphrase of the twenty-fourth Psalm, and, with a slight change of text, it was included in Watts's volume of 1719. The hymns of Addison are few and formal, but they have great dignity and perform their religious purpose with sincerity.

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With Addison we have really passed into the eighteenth century, that celebrated period which was so pleased with itself and which now causes those who are pleased by it to be extraordinarily pleased with themselves. The nineteenth century, beginning with that eminent pair, Wordsworth and Coleridge, judged it harshly; but Matthew Arnold, glacially polite to 'our age of prose and reason, our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century', warned us that there were signs to show that the eighteenth century and its judgements were coming into fashion again. His prophecy was right. Eminent hands have exalted Pope to the highest rank of poets; eminent voices have declared Horace Walpole to be the quintessence of an exquisite age. Gibbon is allowed his place by some; but unfortunately Gibbon was discovered by Mr Boffin in the mid-Victorian age, and we dare not seem to acknowledge Mr Boffin. So we are left with Pope and Horace Walpole. They are the eighteenth century. Round that immortal pair,

> boundless and bare,
> The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Well, I don't believe it. The eighteenth century discloses a larger population if we take the trouble to look for it. It was, for instance, the century of *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, and *Roxana*, the century of *Jonathan Wild*, *George Barnwell*, and *The Beggar's Opera*, the century of *Beer Street*, *Gin Lane*, and *The Newgate Calendar*. There's richness for you. It was the century of poets with qualities far above elegance, the century of Gray, Collins, Smart, Thomson, Cowper, and Blake. It was the century of *The Spectator*, Johnson, Sir Joshua, and Gainsborough, the century of Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, and Goldsmith. It was, of course, the century of the intelligentsia who then called themselves, more briefly, Deists, but it was also the century of Bishop Butler; the century of Hume and Gibbon, but also the century of William Law; the century of *The Fable of the Bees*, but also the century of *Siris*. It was,

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too, the century of romance and escapism, the century of *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Old English Baron*, *The Monk*, and the whole series of Radcliffe novels, as well as the century of Ossian, *The Rowley Poems*, and Percy's *Reliques*. I might multiply instances of romantic activity from Rowe's Shakespeare in 1709 to Malone's in 1790, from Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* to Warton's *History of English Poetry*. But I refrain. And if you ask me why I pile up this mass of details perfectly well known to all of you, my answer is that I am manufacturing a climax, and the climax is this: that if you remember all these facts and forget that the eighteenth century was also the century of Watts and the Wesleys you have left out a vital part of the truth. The eighteenth century is often called the age of scepticism. It was, in fact, an age of intense religious activity. People then argued about religion because they knew that religion was worth arguing about. An irreligious age is one in which people care too little for religion even to discuss it; and for such indifference the only cure is calamity.

In the century of Pope and Horace Walpole, that elegant pair, there were men who devoted themselves to religion as fervently as any of the saints and martyrs of an earlier age. We can begin at once with Isaac Watts, who was born in 1674, the year of Milton's death. He was a Dissenting minister and also an ambitious poet—a belated Metaphysical and an early Augustan. His first collection, *Horae Lyricae*, appeared in 1706, and in 1709 he allowed himself the privilege of a preface. I pause to express some curiosity to know how many enthusiasts for the eighteenth century are familiar with the introductory essays prefixed by Watts and the Wesleys to their volumes. Watts's first preface is a defence of poetry as applied to religion and a defiance of Boileau who had deprecated such application. If, says Watts, the heart were first inflamed from Heaven, and the Muse were called in to assist in the worship, 'then the Song would end where the Inspiration ceases; the whole Composure would be of a Piece, all meridian Light and meridian Fervour'.

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That fine and characteristic phrase not only indicates the spirit in which Watts himself wrote, it marks him off at once from such poets as his younger contemporary, Pope, in whom we find many virtues, but nothing whatsoever resembling 'meridian Light and meridian Fervour'. Indeed, we might use the phrase as a touch-stone of good poetry, and desire to know, if a poem lacks those qualities, what it offers instead.

The volume contains, besides its more expansive effusions, a few hymn-like verses. So I pass at once to his next volume, the *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), which not only contains his best hymns, but is the first miscellaneous hymn-book in our literature. His purpose is clearly set out in an interesting preface, of which I can quote only one instructive sentence. He denounces Psalmody as the worst-managed part of worship. When we have been uplifted by some noble words, 'Yet [he says] the very next line that the Clerk parcels out to us, hath something so *Jewish* and cloudy in it, that darkens our Sight of God the Saviour'. Thus we are reminded that the metrical psalms were dismally sung in lines, each first dictated by the clerk. This abominable alternation of reading and singing was too fixed an abuse for even Watts to abolish. Therefore he must build his hymns line upon line, and make the separable lines cohere into a clear and definite affirmation. The task was almost impossible, but he accomplished it. This first hymn-book of Watts, with its careful index of subjects and of scripture references, as well as a table of first lines, made a simple and practical manual of devotion. The example was not lost on the Wesleys. Watts shaped out the pattern of the congregational hymn as we know it. He was a new kind of ballad-maker. Others before him had written hymns; he was the first to compose a body of hymns of such merit that many of them endure to this day.

His next step was to turn David into a Christian. So in *The Psalms of David imitated in the Language of the New Testament, And apply'd to the Christian State and Worship* (1719), he offered congregations the best Psalms, in the four usual metres, without

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the ancient damnations of Judaism. Once more there is a delightful preface from which I must forbid myself the pleasure of quoting. I can do no more than make bare mention of the numerous engaging personal and explanatory notes scattered in small type throughout the text. The lesser poems usually associated with the name of Watts are contained in a very small volume called *Divine Songs for Children* (1715), in which his intention, declared in the preface, is to teach simple truths in verse, so that very young children might memorize them. The few 'moral songs', which are all that people seem to remember, are added, he says, 'with an air of pleasantry, to provoke some fitter pen to write a book of them'. This tiny book of *Divine Songs* concludes with one of his sweetest poems, *The Cradle Hymn*, worthy of Blake himself, who was not to be born till over forty years later.

Let us leave generalities and come to examples. What is the greatest of all English hymns, the hymn that suits all sorts and conditions of men, at church or at chapel, on ship or at church parade anywhere; the hymn we can sing in triumph or in adversity, the hymn of consolation, comfort, and resignation? It is the first part of Psalm XC, written in common metre by Isaac Watts, and bearing the title 'Man Frail and God Eternal'. Endeavour to dissociate the words from any tune and think of them as a prayer in verse:

Our God, our Help in Ages past,
  Our Hope for years to come,
Our Shelter from the stormy Blast,
  And our eternal Home.

Under the Shadow of thy Throne
  Thy Saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is thine Arm alone,
  And our Defence is sure.

Before the Hills in Order stood,
  Or Earth received her Frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
  To Endless Years the same.

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Thy Word commands our Flesh to Dust,
• *Return, ye Sons of Men*:
All Nations rose from Earth at first,
And turn to Earth again.

A thousand Ages in thy Sight
Are like an Evening gone;
Short as the Watch that ends the Night
Before the rising Sun.

The busy tribes of Flesh and Blood
With all their Lives and Cares
Are carried downwards by thy Flood,
And lost in following Years.

Time like an ever-rolling Stream
Bears all its Sons away;
They fly forgotten as a Dream
Dies at the opening Day.

Like flowr'y Fields the Nations stand
Pleas'd with the Morning-light;
The Flowers beneath the Mower's Hand
Ly withering e'er 'tis Night.

Our God, our Help in Ages past,
Our Hope for Years to come,
Be thou our Guard while Troubles last,
And our eternal Home.

The substitution of 'Oh' for 'Our' was made by John Wesley in his first hymn-book and so passed into currency. Watts himself shows how easily the spirit of poetry may escape from a hymn, for this noble poem is preceded by a long metre version of the same Psalm. I quote two of its stanzas:

A thousand of our Years amount
Scarce to a Day in thine Account;
Like Yesterdays departed Light,
Or the last Watch of ending Night.

Death like an overflowing Stream
Sweeps us away; our Life's a Dream;
An empty Tale; a Morning-flow'r
Cut down and wither'd in an Hour.

Metre and magic are both vanished.

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And now let us try him in another mood. If 'Our God, our Help' is our greatest hymn, surely the most moving is this, based on a great text in Galatians (vi. 14):

When I survey the wond'rous Cross
Where the young Prince of Glory dy'd,
My richest Gain I count but Loss,
And pour Contempt on all my Pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the Death of *Christ* my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his Blood.

See from his Head, his Hands, his Feet,
Sorrow and Love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such Love and Sorrow meet?
Or Thorns compose so rich a Crown?

His dying Crimson like a Robe
Spreads o'er his Body on the Tree,
Then I am dead to all the Globe,
And all the Globe is dead to me.

Were the whole Realm of Nature mine,
That were a Present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my Life, my Soul, my All.

That is the reading of the very rare first edition. In the second line 2 becomes 'On which the Prince of Glory dy'd' and has so remained. Stanza 4, disturbing to modern taste, was omitted by Whitefield and is not now sung. The real objection to it is literary. Watts, for a moment, lost the restraint of his text in Galatians, and 'His dying Crimson' is simply bad poetic diction.

But Watts has other, more joyous, notes. What of that lively quick-step for happy Christians, beginning 'Come, we that love the Lord', and ending:

We're marching through *Immanuel's* Ground
To fairer Worlds on high.

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John Wesley liked this and used it often; though by needlessly altering 'We' to 'Ye' he succeeded in confounding the persons, grammatically, at least. In the same strain is the familiar

> Come let us join our chearful Songs
> With Angels round the Throne.

A similar hymn has a passage that never fails to move me:

> There is a Land of pure Delight,
> Where Saints immortal reign;
> Infinite Day excludes the Night,
> And Pleasures banish Pain.
>
> There everlasting Spring abides,
> And never-withering Flowers:
> Death like a narrow Sea divides
> This Heav'nly Land from ours.
>
> Sweet Fields beyond the swelling Flood
> Stand drest in living Green:
> So to the *Jews* old *Canaan* stood,
> While *Jordan* roll'd between....

I think the last lines have a note of greatness. We are shown a visionary realm of beauty, and then suddenly the scene is condensed to stern reality. But Watts is full of surprises. Sometimes you get a line like 'Wild as the lightning, various as the moon', sometimes an unforgettable epithet such as:

> Above these ruinable Skies
> They make their last Retreat,

and again in

> Our everlasting Hopes arise
> Above these ruinable Skies.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary* Watts is the sole inventor and proprietor of the epithet.

And here, with much still to say, I must leave Isaac Watts. I do not pretend that he was anything but a minor poet of his age, but I claim for him that many of his hymns are permanent

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additions to worship and that some rise into the higher rank of great religious poems.

When we pass from Watts to the Wesleys we pass from the narrow life of eighteenth-century Dissent to the larger area of the Anglican Church, for the Wesleys were sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons of the clergy. Samuel the father (1662–1735), rector of Epworth, begat many children, and wrote hymns. Samuel the son (1691–1739) went to Westminster and Christ Church, became head-usher of Westminster School, contracted a friendship with Atterbury, then Dean, and thus became acquainted with Prior. He wrote hymns. John (1703–91), who covers every decade of the century, went to Charterhouse and Christ Church, became Fellow of Lincoln, went to Georgia in 1735, came back in 1738, and wrote hymns. Charles (1707–88), almost as long-lived, went to Westminster and Christ Church, went to Georgia, came back, and wrote hymns. All took holy orders. That is a concise account of one of the most astonishing families this country has produced; and I here proclaim my firm belief that John Wesley was the greatest Englishman of the eighteenth century. The diversity and immensity of his labours are almost incredible. He had one sure mark of the great man, he was undefeatable and inexhaustible, and he had command alike over vast crowds and over the smallest details of administration. Moreover, he could inspire other men to work for him. Of his Georgia mission I shall say nothing, except that it marked a turning-point in his life. On the long and stormy voyage he fraternized with a party of Herrnhuters, disciples of Count Zinzendorf, one of the religious bodies into which distracted Europe had broken up after the Hussite wars and later persecutions. During the most fearful tempests the brethren not only showed no fear of death, but went about quietly performing the most menial offices for the lowliest members of the ship's company. The Fellow of Lincoln, always very much the scholar and gentleman, was stricken into abasement, for he knew that in their

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sense he was not a Christian. From the brethren he learned German, and he taught them English, and began translating some of the hymns from their *Gesangbuch*. For us the chief result of the Georgia mission was the production of the very first Wesleyan hymn-book, and, I am told, the second hymn-book produced in America. The title is simply *Collection of Psalms and Hymns. Charlestown, Printed by Lewis Timothy*, 1737. The original is one of the rarest of books, but a facsimile was made in 1882, and I fortunately possess a copy of that. It is a very small, ill-printed volume bearing no name of authors or compiler. Of the hymns in it, over thirty are taken from Watts, four from Addison, and some from Austin's *Devotions in the Antient Way of Offices*. John Wesley contributed six of his translations from the Herrnhut *Gesangbuch*. Two are by Samuel Wesley the elder and four by Samuel the younger. Herbert is represented by *Discipline*, so altered that it has ceased to be Herbert and become John Wesley; but that is the form in which Methodists have always sung it. The odd fact is that Charles Wesley contributed nothing to the first Wesleyan hymn-book. The inspiration had not come. And so, of the two famous brothers, the first to publish hymns was John, not Charles. I should like to speak out loud and bold in praise of John the hymn-writer, because he seems unduly disparaged. I know the objections. His total is small—few more than thirty hymns, and all are translated from the German except three, two from the French, and one from the Spanish. We do not know how much he contributed to the hymns published under the names of both brothers; but those definitely assigned to him alone, though they may lack Charles's fluency and flaming ecstasy, though they may be restrained in matter and form, have a noble and uplifted dignity which only the best hymns have. I will quote the second stanza of John's first hymn in the Charlestown book, pointing out that the slightly irregular metre was afterwards altered by John, and that a much abbreviated version appears in *The Methodist Hymn-Book*, in which

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what is here one great stanza is unhappily cut into three. This is the original translated form, a hymn in praise of the greatness of God:

> Eternity thy Fountain was,
> Which, like thee, no Beginning knew;
> Thou wast e'er Time began his Race,
> E'er glow'd with Stars th' eternal Blew.
> Greatness unspeakable is thine,
> Greatness whose undiminish'd Ray
> When short liv'd Worlds are lost, shall shine,
> When Earth and Heaven are fled away.
> Unchangeable, all perfect Lord,
> Of Life the boundless Sea,
> What lives and moves, moves by thy Word,
> What is, is all from thee.

I am sure Emily Brontë would have said *Amen* to that. Turn from it to one of Charles's most popular hymns. I quote the first stanza and one other now always omitted:

> O Love divine, how sweet thou art!
> When shall I find my willing heart
> All taken up by thee?
> I thirst, I faint, I die to prove
> The greatness of redeeming love,
> The love of Christ to me....
>
> O that I could with favour'd John
> Recline my weary head upon
> The dear Redeemer's breast.
> From care, and sin, and sorrow free,
> Give me, O Lord, to find in thee
> My everlasting rest.

This has one quality of the good hymn—movement, due to its metrical felicity. You cannot fail to notice that it has the 'meridian Light and meridian Fervour' for which you will search the contemporary poems of Pope in vain. It belongs, you may care to remember, to 1749, the year of Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. Yet when you compare it with the stanza I have quoted from John, do you not miss a note

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of dignity and restraint? Let us give Charles all his due; but let us not undervalue John. Another great hymn by John, which I have not time to read, is 'Thou hidden love of God', translated from Gerhard Tersteegen's 'Verborgne Gottes Liebe du'. The last hymn by John which I can mention is a version of Paul Gerhardt's 'Befiehl du deine Wege'. Thus it begins:

Commit thou all thy Griefs
And Ways into his Hands;
To his sure Truth and tender Care
Who Earth and Heav'n commands,

Who points the Clouds their Course,
Whom Winds and Seas obey;
He shall direct thy wand'ring Feet,
He shall prepare thy Way.

A few years before John had translated this hymn, an obscure German church-musician had borrowed some of its stanzas for a lengthy cantata of his called *The Passion of Our Lord according to St Matthew*, where it serves as an interlude in the dramatic narrative. It was set, with wonderful harmonies, to Hassler's 'love-song' tune associated with another hymn, 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden', which happens to be the chorale that comes next but one in the *Passion*. When, among the miracles wrought by time, it was gradually discovered that this obscure church-musician was one of the very greatest composers who have lived in any age, and his *Matthew Passion* reached England after a becoming interval of a hundred years or more, 'Befiehl du deine Wege' was translated into some such form as this:

Commit thy ways to Jesus,
Thy burdens and thy cares.

This fits Hassler's chorale melody, and Wesley's short metre does not; so that tended to fall out of use; but I notice signs of revival in later hymn-books.

The spiritual distress which John Wesley experienced in Georgia does not concern us on the present occasion. When he

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returned to England he resolved to go to Herrnhut to observe the daily life of the community there. That visit confirmed his faith and determined his future. He was now thirty-five. He could have had preferment in the Church, or he could have resumed academic work in Oxford. He refused to consider either alternative. Writing to a friend in 1739, he said: 'I look upon the whole world as my parish.' So he resolved to attempt the evangelization of Britain, which seemed to him to need the propagation of the Gospel as urgently as any foreign parts. Thus in 1739 began that apostolic life of nearly fifty years, during which he travelled 250,000 miles, crossed the Irish sea forty-two times, and preached over 40,000 sermons, sometimes five in a day, beginning as soon as there was light. Here I must go back to Charles, who now comes into the story. At Oxford Charles and one or two friends began to practise the strict observance of religion which earned them the nickname of Methodists. John, not then in Oxford, joined them later. We do not hear that Charles suffered from John's deep spiritual distress in Georgia; but in 1738 he, too, felt assurance of Divine acceptance, and was ready to join John in his apostolic mission. The brothers worked together in perfect unity of spirit. They were both strong churchmen, and their aim was to make churchmen better Christians—to preach, as John says, 'the plain old religion of the Church of England, which is now almost everywhere spoken against as Methodism'. But the area of their work steadily broadened till it reached those who hardly knew the name or meaning of religion.

The year 1739 is important, not only as the beginning of the Wesleys' apostolic mission, but as the date of their first English hymn-book. The Wesley method was to found societies in places where they had gained a following, and to appoint a leader to conduct week-day meetings for prayer and praise and spiritual encouragement. A hymn-book was not only a bond of union for the societies; it could be, as Watts had shown, a daily manual of doctrine and practice. The book of 1739, which

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is not easily obtained, differed at once from the Charlestown book, for the title-page bore the full names of the compilers, as did most of the volumes that followed. This is called *Hymns and Sacred Poems. Published by John Wesley, M.A., Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, and Charles Wesley, M.A., Student of Christ Church, Oxford*, and it bore as motto the passage from Colossians iii. 16, which states the writers' purpose most exactly. Before the text of the hymns there is a preface of eight vigorous pages denouncing the 'Mystick Divines' and their 'still' religion, and demanding from the faithful an active Christian life. In the Wesleyan hymns we sometimes meet indications of the brothers' dislike both of Quietism and of Calvinism. That John ever understood what we may call the higher Calvinism may be doubted. He was an apostle, not a theologian. But what he could not endure was the doctrine that Christ did not die for all, because millions were predestined to damnation. That men will refuse the grace of God and rush headlong to destruction is a matter of choice, not of necessity. Wesley believed that grace was offered to all, and says so in the hymns. Charles's Easter hymn in the 1739 book contains this stanza:

> What tho' once we perish'd All,
> Partners in our Parents' Fall?
> Second Life we All receive,
> In our Heav'nly *Adam* live.

The volume of 1739, the first classic of Methodism, was oddly compiled. It contains no more than 139 pieces, among which are several passages in heroic couplets, which might indeed be called 'Sacred Poems', but which are certainly not 'Hymns' in any sense. The most notable difference between this volume and the Charlestown volume of 1737 is the total eclipse of Dr Watts and the refulgent emergence of George Herbert, who contributes forty-two of the hymns. I believe that John Wesley in this official hymn-book of his new crusade deliberately avoided giving prominence to a Dissenter, and chose a churchman of

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unquestionable orthodoxy. As these forty-two hymns may seem to refute what I have said earlier about the unsuitability of seventeenth-century poems as hymns, I should add that they are ruthlessly altered and in a book generally nameless they are labelled 'from Herbert'. The denounced 'Mysticks' are Count Zinzendorf and the Herrnhut brethren, from whose *Gesangbuch* John contributed over twenty translations. The nature of his disagreement with them does not belong to our subject. The great new name is that of Charles Wesley—if we may use the word 'name' of compositions nearly all of which are anonymous. Thus, it is disputed to this day whether two hymns by Antoinette Bourignon were translated by John Wesley or John Byrom. I believe they are Wesley's. Among the hymns of Charles we find the famous hymn 'for Christmass Day':

> Hark how all the Welkin rings
> 'Glory to the King of Kings,
> 'Peace on Earth, and Mercy mild,
> 'God and sinners reconcil'd.'

There are ten four-lined stanzas. But the hymn in this form disappeared, and emerged much later with the fours turned into eights, with some abbreviations, and with several verbal changes, made chiefly by George Whitefield and Martin Madan; and so we got the now sempiternal 'Hark the herald angels sing'. The hymn had undergone the process to which the ballads were subjected, and had been made more singable. The essential subject, the joyful assertion of the mystery of the Incarnation, was left untouched. Though you may prefer to hear the Welkin ring, I think you will have to admit that George Whitefield's Herald Angels have come to stay.

In this volume we find the famous Easter hymn, 'Christ the Lord is risen to-day' and the almost equally famous Ascension hymn, 'Hail the day that sees him rise', together with other variously noble and moving hymns, such as 'Where shall my wond'ring Soul begin', 'O filial Deity', 'Peace, doubting Heart', 'Jesu, my God and King', 'Sons of God triumphant

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rise', and the very powerful 'Arm of the Lord, awake, awake'. Possibly the finest of all is that beginning 'Eternal Beam of Light Divine'. This early volume, published in 1739, two years after Pope's imitations of Horace, clearly proved that in Charles Wesley there had arisen in England a new religious poet of burning sincerity, of high poetic feeling, of daring force of expression, and of intensely characteristic style, entirely free from the 'conceits' that trouble us sometimes in Herbert. The 1739 volume was followed by slightly varied collections. Thereafter the hymns appeared regularly, sometimes as slight pamphlets, sometimes as volumes, and once on a large scale in the *Short Hymns on Select Passages of Holy Scripture* (1762), containing over 2,000. John was just as prolific in prose. I do not propose to weary you with a Wesleyan bibliography. You will find a compact table of the hymns in Julian's invaluable *Dictionary of Hymnology*. But I feel I should mention one very remarkable volume, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, containing such memorable poems as 'Author of Life divine' and 'Victim divine, thy grace we claim', the latter paraphrased from Dean Brevent's prose, and usually much altered. You are at first inclined to think that they belong to the eighteen-forties and the Oxford movement. They were written by Charles Wesley, and their date is 1745.

I am compelled to pass over John Wesley's *Journal* with the briefest of notices. It is mainly religious. But if you want to know what England was really like in the eighteenth century —working, swearing, rioting, boozing, and praying England, England of the press-gang, with the fear of foreign invasion not entirely worked out of it—turn from the polished wit of Pope and the elegant fripperies of Horace Walpole to Wesley's *Journal*. There is little charm in the plain, unadorned language; yet this man, who went wherever horse could carry him, who faced bestial mobs of drink-sodden men and furious half-naked women in remote regions where the laws of God and man were scarcely known, this man re-christianized half of England, and

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brought into the darkest and foulest dens the light of divine love and the hope of salvation. The separation of Wesley's followers from the Church became inevitable. From the beginning the Church shut its ears and bolted and barred its doors against Methodism; and at last, in his old age, John, in spite of his belief in the Apostolic Succession, began to ordain his own ministers. The most powerful opponent of the separatist movement, the most fearless denouncer of John's ordinations, was his brother Charles, who continued to declare his membership of the Church of England. At the very end he refused to be buried in the Wesley grave in the City Road and desired interment in the burying-ground of his own parish church. And so these wonderful brothers, the apostle and the poet, who worked together all those years for the glory of God, were divided in death, and lie apart. The Church, like Watts's sluggard, cried out, 'You have waked me too soon, I must slumber again.' And it slept, dreaming sweetly of its pluralities, for just a hundred years, when another band of Oxford enthusiasts arose, 'with fanatical doctrine and untranquil devotion', and hammered at the Anglican doors, demanding to know whether the Church of England were alive or dead.

When we turn to the Wesley hymns, the first detail to strike our notice is their liberal use of the words of Scripture. But with a difference. There are variations that we are inclined to accept as a poet's preference. That view is wrong. Both the brothers were close students of the Greek Testament, and the modifications are, in fact, emendations. Where the Authorized Version translates two similar Greek words by one English word, the Wesleys observe the difference. John anticipated many of the changes made by the company of revisers. Dr Bett, of Handsworth College, author of a delightful essay called *The Hymns of Methodism in their Literary Relations*, has pointed out many examples. But it is not from the Bible alone that there come familiar echoes in the hymns. I have noted

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some, Dr Bett has noted many more, and to him I must refer you, for there is no time for quotations. The Wesleys were not narrow zealots. They were fine classical scholars, and John's enjoyment of profane contemporary literature sometimes shocked his more puritanical friends. One obvious echo of current literature comes in the familiar hymn beginning:

> Love Divine, all loves excelling,
> Joy of Heaven to Earth come down,
> Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
> All thy faithful mercies crown.

What is that but the song of Venus in the last act of Dryden's *King Arthur*?—

> Fairest Isle, all Isles excelling,
> Seat of Pleasures, and of Loves;
> Venus here will choose her Dwelling,
> And forsake her Cyprian Groves.

Equally clear is another echo:

> Talk with us, Lord, thy word reveal,
> While here o'er earth we rove;
> Speak to our hearts, and let us feel
> The kindling of thy love.
>
> With thee conversing, we forget
> All time, and toil, and care;
> Labour is rest, and pain is sweet,
> If thou, my God, art there.

Need we be reminded of Eve's speech to Adam?—

> With thee conversing I forget all time,
> All seasons and their change, all please alike.

But perhaps the most unexpected person we meet in the Wesley hymns is genial and worldly Matt Prior. Prior had his serious side and exhibited it lavishly in *Solomon on the Vanity of the World. A Poem. In Three Books.* This is the kind of work mentioned with respect in its own day, and afterwards read by no one but the harmless drudges who compile histories of

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English literature. Both the Wesleys held it in high esteem and certainly borrowed from it. Of several passages which I had marked I will give you only one. Solomon, in a reflective mood, remarks:

> We weave the chaplet and we crown the bowl,
> And smiling see the nearer waters roll,
> Till the strong gusts of raging passion rise,
> Till the dire tempest mingles earth and skies.

Charles Wesley both transfers and transforms this passage thus:

> Jesu, Lover of my soul,
> Let me to thy bosom fly,
> While the nearer waters roll,
> While the tempest still is nigh.

The great theme of the Wesley hymns is Salvation, the glorious Redemption of the World by the Sacrifice of Jesus, who was very God of very God; and as Charles was not intimidated, like Watts, by the tyranny of the Clerk, he could express his great theme in forms so numerous that he became the most varied and audacious metrist of his time. We could spend a whole lecture in illustrating the fertility of his invention. Yet, is it not strange, the histories of prosody barely mention him. If his hymns had been addressed to Pan or Apollo or some other heathen figure, or if they were written in some foreign tongue, how loud the praise would be! But alas, he addressed the Christian Deity in English, and his poems are dismissed as mere hymns. In matter, the sacred poetry of Charles Wesley appears open to the charge of monotony. But the monotony (which I do not admit) is deliberate repetition. He may be likened to the writers of sonnet sequences or similar forms of associated lyrics—*In Memoriam*, for example. The difference between him and the sonneteers is that his theme is much vaster, his scale much larger, and his forms more varied. With him repetition means strength, not weakness. It implies the power to present the great theme in a multitude of ways

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suited to a multitude of hearers. Saintsbury declares that Charles Wesley, for writing 6,000 hymns, 'was guilty of a sin of excess for which he deserved a very short sojourn in the mildest shades of Purgatory'. You might as well damn Schubert outright for composing over 600 songs. I won't be hard on a Miltonic jest; but the whole point of the matter is that there is no sin of excess. Let us rather say that here is God's plenty, from which we may choose as much or as little as we wish.

To begin quoting from the hymns is dangerous. One might go on for hours. Charles Wesley employs almost every combination of lines that could be used as a hymn. Here is a pair of widely contrasted stanzas:

> Our life is a dream, our time as a stream
> Glides swiftly away,
> And the fugitive moment refuses to stay;
> The arrow is flown, the moment is gone,
> The millennial year
> Rushes on to our view, and Eternity's here.

Set against that fluidity of movement the drooping trochaic gait of this:

> Depth of mercy, can there be
> Mercy still reserved for me?
> Can my God his wrath forbear,
> Me, the chief of sinners, spare?

Even the familiar long metre takes a new note in the hymn that begins thus:

> Stay, thou insulted Spirit, stay,
> Though I have done thee such despite,
> Nor cast the sinner quite away,
> Nor take thine everlasting flight.

The Methodist societies, during the forty years from 1739, had grown vastly in number and power, and at last importuned their leader for a hymn-book of their own. John thought his various short collections were sufficient; but his flock thought

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otherwise. And so in 1780 appeared the celebrated volume entitled *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists.* It has a precise and definite preface from John saying that the hymns are arranged 'under proper heads, according to the experience of real Christians. So that this book is in effect a little body of experimental and practical divinity.' His more literary comments on the Spirit of Poetry and the Spirit of Piety will interest the students of Wordsworth's later Essay, which, indeed, goes little beyond John Wesley's. Whether the Methodists got the hymn-book they desired may be doubted; they certainly got the hymn-book that John Wesley thought they needed. Turn to any ordinary hymnal and you will find hymns for the church seasons from Advent to Trinity, filled out by hymns for missions, hospitals, and other special purposes, and followed by a great mass of 'general hymns'. In the Methodist hymn-book there are no hymns for special seasons or services, and no general hymns. The hymns, 525 in number, are divided into five main parts, each part having several titled sections relating to the stages and conditions of religious life. It is, as John says, a body of practical divinity. The omissions are such as we should expect. The great sacramental hymns are not included, nor are the hymns for Christmas, Easter, or Ascension. You think of Charles Wesley's most popular hymns, and lo, they are not there. Nothing is there for pleasure; everything is there for stern use. What the modern reader may regret is not the exclusions, but some of the admissions. Evangelical Christianity at this period was over-concerned with the physical circumstances of death. Watts was a frequent offender. A hymn like Charles Wesley's 'Ah, lovely appearance of death', rejoicing over the very corpse from which a happy spirit has fled, approaches the extreme of pious necrophily, and that hymn is properly banished from modern collections. The great hymn-book of 1780 served the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion for fifty years. In 1830 a new edition was published with a few missing

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favourites inserted into the text and two supplements added containing other popular hymns, some by other hands, which had been used by the Wesleys at various times. One of the insertions has a curious history. A 'painful preacher' named John Cennick extended his pious labours by compiling a collection of hymns in 1752, most of which must be dismissed as mere doggerel. You are not to suppose that the eighteenth century produced no bad hymns. One of Cennick's effusions was a Second Advent hymn, beginning thus:

> Lo! he cometh, countless trumpets
> Blow before his bloody sign.
> 'Mid ten thousand saints and angels
> See the Crucified shine.
> Allelujah,
> Welcome, welcome, bleeding Lamb.

This is quite detestable; but Charles Wesley discerned some possibilities in it, and in his *Hymns of Intercession* (1758) turned it into:

> Lo! he comes with clouds descending,
> Once for favoured sinners slain,

a hymn of four stanzas, with the unfortunate last line,

> Jah! Jehovah, Everlasting God come down.

Then Martin Madan took a hand in the game—'meddlesome Madan' as I call him, for his activity took the form, not of writing hymns but of rewriting them. He enlarged the hymn by taking in matter from a different hymn by Wesley, made some verbal changes, banished 'Jah! Jehovah', and left the hymn certainly improved. Others made minor changes, including abbreviation; and Thomas Olivers, a Methodist preacher of extraordinary antecedents, whom I shall mention again, completed the confusion by writing a Second Advent poem which included Wesley's first line; and when his poem was reduced to a hymn that line became the first. Here you have ballad-making in the very act. The original idea of a triumphant Second Advent remains; but who wrote the words

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that are now printed (if they are all printed alike) it is impossible to say; and we have the not unknown phenomenon of identical words appearing in another composition.

The style of Charles Wesley is usually unmistakable. If you glance through *The Methodist Hymn-book* of to-day and find a stanza beginning:

Stupendous height of heavenly love,

you may feel sure it is Wesley's. If you find one beginning:

Come let us sing of a wonderful love,
Tender and true,

you may be sure it is not. If you find a hymn beginning:

Hark, hark my soul, angelic songs are swelling
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore,

you may feel sure that it is not Wesley's; but if you find one with strength instead of verbose sentimentality, such as:

Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armour on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies,
Through his Eternal Son...

Stand then in his great might,
With all his strength endued,
But take to arm you for the fight,
The panoply of God,

you can feel sure it is Wesley's. If you find a stanza of a hymn for children beginning:

Tell me the story slowly,
That I may take it in,

you can feel sure it is not by Wesley; if you find one beginning:

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child,
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to thee,

you can feel sure that Wesley wrote it. It has something of Blake's penetrating power. The hymn was first published in

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seven stanzas in a collection of 1742, and republished with seven more stanzas as Part II in 1763. Blake was born in 1757, when Methodism was well established, and in the odd religious circle of his youth the hymns of Watts and the Wesleys must have been well known—of Watts he certainly knew something; but I am not going to attempt any fanciful affiliations. What similarity there was I shall mention presently. Charles Wesley wrote every one of his innumerable hymns as if he had never written another. Each seems the product of a renewed religious experience which he must proclaim. There let us leave him, naming by way of farewell his finest poem, that known as 'Wrestling Jacob' (1742). It is not a hymn in form or style. It has fourteen stanzas, two of which were omitted from the official collection of 1780. The modern hymnals try cutting the remainder into halves or ruthlessly shortening it. But the right use is to read it as a mystical poem, identifying the Angel who wrestled with Jacob with the Redeemer who wrestles with man for his soul. As it is rarely seen in full I will quote it:

Come, O thou Traveller unknown,
  Whom still I hold, but cannot see,
My company before is gone,
  And I am left alone with thee:
With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

I need not tell thee who I am,
  My misery or sin declare:
Thyself hast call'd me by my name;
  Look on thy hands and read it there:
But who, I ask thee, who art thou!
Tell me thy name, and tell me now.

In vain thou strugglest to get free,
  I never will unloose my hold:
Art thou the man who died for me?
  The secret of thy love unfold:
Wrestling, I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.

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Wilt thou not yet to me reveal
  Thy new unutterable name?
O tell me, I beseech thee, tell;
  To know it now resolv'd I am:
Wrestling, I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.

'Tis all in vain to hold thy tongue,
  Or touch the hollow of my thigh;
Tho' every sinew were unstrung,
  Out of my arms thou shalt not fly:
Wrestling, I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.

What tho' my shrinking flesh complain,
  And murmur to contend so long;
I rise superior to my pain,
  When I am weak, then I am strong:
And when my all of strength shall fail,
I shall with the GOD-MAN prevail.

My strength is gone, my nature dies,
  I sink beneath thy weighty hand,
Faint to revive, and fall to rise,
  I fall, and yet by faith I stand:
I stand, and will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.

Yield to me now, for I am weak;
  But confident in self despair!
Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,
  Be conquer'd by my instant prayer:
Speak, or thou never hence shall move,
And tell me if thy name is Love.

'Tis Love, 'tis Love! thou diedst for me:
  I hear thy whisper in my heart;
The morning breaks, the shadows flee;
  Pure Universal Love thou art:
To me, to all, thy bowels move,
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

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My prayer hath power with GOD; the grace
  Unspeakable I now receive;
Thro' faith I see thee face to face,
  I see thee face to face, and live!
In vain I have not wept and strove,
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

I know thee, Saviour, who thou art,
  JESUS, the feeble sinner's friend;
Nor wilt thou with the night depart,
  But stay, and love me to the end:
Thy mercies never shall remove,
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

The Sun of Righteousness on me
  Hath ris'n, with healing in his wings;
Wither'd my nature's strength; from thee
  My soul its life and succour brings:
My help is all laid up above,
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

Contented now, upon my thigh,
  I halt till life's short journey end;
All helplessness, all weakness, I
  On thee alone for strength depend;
Nor have I power from thee to move;
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

Lame as I am, I take the prey,
  Hell, earth, and sin with ease o'ercome;
I leap for joy, pursue my way,
  And as a bounding hart fly home,
Thro' all eternity to prove
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

Evangelical Christianity in the eighteenth century gives us a few other names, to which we must refer with scandalous brevity. Philip Doddridge (1702–51) died before a collection of his hymns was published in 1755. Their level, as a whole, is high. Everybody knows 'Hark the glad sound, the Saviour comes', and nearly everybody knows 'My God, and is thy Table spread', and 'O God of Bethel'. The contentious

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Augustus Montague Toplady (1740–78), whose Calvinist controversy with Wesley may be studied by amateurs of invective, but by no others, is forgotten in all his prose and remembered for his one great hymn, 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me'. The author of that should have written others as good; but he is most disappointing. His touch is bad—he constantly uses almost grotesquely inappropriate words and phrases. Even the last stanza of 'Rock of Ages' (which also borrows from *Solomon*) is never sung as he wrote it.

And now we meet one who is almost a major poet, and only by accident a hymn-writer. The ever-lovable William Cowper had already written verses before he joined the Rev. John Newton (1725–1807) in the production of *Olney Hymns* in 1779. Cowper's hymns are more than sixty in number. In the main they follow the manner of Watts, and do not attain to the 'meridian Light and meridian Fervour' of Charles Wesley. I must confess to finding them as a whole rather disappointing and flat. Yet a few have justly passed into all the hymn-books: 'Oh for a closer walk with God', 'There is a fountain filled with blood', 'Sometimes a light surprises', 'Hark my Soul! it is the Lord', and 'God moves in a mysterious way'. They are good, but they have little of the pronounced character that one finds in the best parts of *The Task* and in nearly all the letters. Newton's best-known hymns are 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds' and 'Glorious things of thee are spoken'.

A still earlier person whom I should have mentioned is the attractive John Byrom (1691–1763), who managed to combine in his life medicine, shorthand, mysticism, Toryism, Jacobitism, and wit, together with an unceasing pen. He wrote quantities of prose and verse and published none of it. His engaging Journals and his likeable poems have been made fully available by the Chetham Society. Of his longer effusions we must here say nothing except to note that he was both a witty poet and a fluent paraphraser. I cannot forgive him his attempt to versify the Advent Collect, as I believe that to be the noblest

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short complete piece of prose in English. His attempt fails as it deserves. A more memorable failure is the attempt to versify the prayer for all sorts and conditions of men; for it begins with this couplet:

> It will bear the repeating again and again
> Will that prayer for all sorts and conditions of men;

lines that so instantly recall the once famous advertisement:

> They come as a boon and a blessing to men,
> The Pickwick, the Owl and the Waverley pen,

that we can hardly read further, and, indeed, need not. His hymns proper are few and unsuccessful. But there are two, called *The Desponding Soul's Wish* and *The Answer*, which deserve attention for the metrical device, recalling some of the old French forms, which makes the last line of each stanza the first of the next. He tries hymns for all the church seasons, and fails except in one, for his second attempt at a poem on the Nativity gives us the one hymn that preserves his name:

> Christians, awake, salute the happy morn
> Whereon the Saviour of the world was born.

For my last example of eighteenth-century hymnody I return to that curious person, Thomas Olivers. He found himself attracted by a Hebrew doxology, turned it into English verse, and so gave us the very noble hymn 'The God of Abraham praise'. Those interested in the subject will find the original Hebrew, a literal translation, and the complete English hymn (usually much abbreviated) in that excellent work of reference, Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*.

And now let us cast up our account. I may seem to have made many digressions and to have forgotten that the purpose of a Warton lecture is to present some aspect of English poetry. That purpose I have kept steadily in view. Indeed, I might describe my aim as an attempt to add a footnote to the history of English poetry in Warton's own century. It would run in some such terms as these: The eighteenth century, usually

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described as the age of prose and reason, the age destitute of faith and earnestness, was an age of intense religious activity, manifested in the work of Joseph Butler and William Law, who wrote in prose, and specially in the saintly life of Isaac Watts, in the unparalleled apostolic mission of the Wesleys, and in the lesser labours of other Evangelical Christians, the effect upon English literature being the production of over 7,000 religious lyrics, many of which belong to a high order of poetry and show a fertility of metrical device and a richness of spiritual content unequalled by any contributors to the secular poetry of the age. Further, this extraordinary outburst of religious poetry is ignored in most histories of English literature and treated as if it had never existed. Further, many of these poems have passed into general memory, like folk-songs, and many more have been continuously printed from their own time to the present in the most widely circulated anthologies of verse, the hymn-books. Further, these poems firmly assert religious doctrine, religious duty, and religious mythology in forms that can be sung by Christians of almost every denomination. Further, these poems, passing on from generation to generation, like the Bible, have helped to form the very texture of the English mind. These are great claims, and I do not think they can be lightly dismissed.

I have not sought to dwell on the theological ground of our subject. This is not the place for such an attempt, and indeed, as I am not associated in any way with the Methodist or any other Free Church, I am not the man to make it. I speak as a student of letters interested in a neglected part of eighteenth-century literature. This, however, can at least be said without offence to anyone. That man is mystical as well as material is sound psychology and sound sense. We have heard much lately of a desire to raise the standard of life in this country. Of proposals to gratify man's material needs there has been an abundance. Of proposals to develop man's spiritual life we have heard less. Can it be questioned that the mystical is at least as

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important as the material—that without the creative spirit we shall be mere bondmen in a servile state? The desire to bring this country back to religion unfortunately resolves itself into unseemly squabbles between parties and sects. Into that dismal and dusty arena I decline to descend; but I can point to the hymn as a fount of blessing accessible to all. No lecturer has a right to come here and recommend such-and-such a hymn to you because it teaches such-and-such a doctrine; but he is entitled to say that, if you profess a liking for such-and-such a hymn because it teaches no doctrine whatsoever, you are liking something which is not a hymn. Turn to Watts, who expressly sought to make his hymns acceptable to all denominations of Christians; turn to John Wesley, who compiled one collection entitled *Hymns and Spiritual Songs intended for the Use of Real Christians of All Denominations*; and you will learn how to be wide without being flat, and how to be precise without being narrow. Watts and the Wesleys, above all English writers, seem to have a feeling for the special work a congregational hymn has to do; and that work may be called the creation of a sense of belonging to a continuing fellowship. A hymn is a mystical poem, full of symbols which give us a hold upon that continuity, or immensity, or eternity, from which we cannot be cut off without being lost in a world of other lost creatures. True community can only be found in that conviction of continuity; and it seems to me that continuity is to be sought for rather than community, as the greater that includes the less. The sense of restoration to our own true home and family animates the six-and-twenty stanzas of that wonderful sixteenth-century hymn:

> Jerusalem, my happy home,
> When shall I come to thee?
> When shall my labours have an end?
> Thy joys when shall I see?

Whether the symbols of religious poetry are interpreted literally or figuratively, they are a vital necessity, if human

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life, however secure materially, is to contain something of the 'Presence which is not to be put by'. But these are matters that invite us to trespass beyond our subject.

You will notice, I hope with approval, that I have avoided any attempt to make fanciful associations—to say that Watts anticipated Blake or that Charles Wesley was the forerunner of later romantic poets. What I will do is to state a proposition which can hardly be questioned. The poetic diction of Pope and his imitators was not the language of the eighteenth century. It was the *patois* of fashion, the temporary dialect of St James's. To find the real language of the age we must turn to the hymn-writers, who spoke the language of the people, who affected many more thousands than the fashionable writers ever reached, and maintained the simple sincerity of feeling, the natural association of object and description, which needed no discovery, but was already there for Wordsworth to use. He tried several times to describe the language he wanted, but never succeeded in making the matter clear to himself or to us. Yet it was easy to describe. What he wanted was the language of the eighteenth-century hymn-writers.

One word more and I have done. I think we shall be unjust to the eighteenth century and its divine songs if we forget that it was also the century of Handel. How Handel first set Italian opera firmly on its feet in England with *Rinaldo* in 1711 and how he passed from opera in Italian to oratorio in English are matters belonging to the history of another art. But we should not forget that some of his finest music was set to words drawn from the English Bible and the English poets. In particular we should name *Messiah*, loved and sung everywhere in this land of choralists. Yet it is surrounded by mystery. It was never printed in Handel's lifetime. There is no true text, and musicians still dispute how it should be performed. And of Handel himself, one of the great public figures of the age, we know almost as little as we know of Shakespeare. When, a year ago, we attempted to celebrate the bicentenary of the first

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performance of *Messiah*, how many gave a thought to the writer who made the astonishing cento of passages from the Bible which forms the text? I am certain that he was not the shallow and showy Charles Jennens who passed it off as his own—his other compilations prove that conclusively. No; the true author was not part of eighteenth-century affectation, he was part of eighteenth-century devotion, the meek and suppressed clergyman, Pooley, who acted as chaplain and secretary to the egregious Jennens. You should read the text, sometimes, apart from the music, to find how close the elegant age of prose and reason could get to the mystery of religion. To name particular numbers would be invidious. But there is one that stands above all, so great an affirmation that they put the first words of it on Handel's monument in the Abbey. What those mysterious sentences from the Book of Job literally mean, the agitated marginal notes of translators and commentators leave us in some doubt. They were written, perhaps, about the time at which Aeschylus was writing *Prometheus*. Prometheus had a saving secret; but so had Job, and it saved him. The secret of Prometheus does not concern us; the secret of Job concerns us deeply, and Handel's musical genius makes it clear to us: it is Faith, the greatest of God's gifts to man, the one gift that not God himself could take away from Job—Faith, which survives affliction and calamity, bodily torment and destruction, which annihilates the attorney's notion of evidence, which defeats the devil himself, and animates the soul of man for ever. The words are old, but Handel has made of them one of the most divine songs of the eighteenth century:

> I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I shall see God.

And with that strain we may leave our subject and our century.

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